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Daughters of Dionysus:
Women Writers and the Dark Side of Late-Victorian Hellenism

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship of women writers to Hellenism in the late-nineteenth century. In recent years critics have tended to focus on women's exclusion from the study and interpretation of classical literature and culture. Yet, I contend that the proliferation of Greek subjects in women's literature from the middle of the century onwards, suggest a collective movement *into* the classical tradition by women writers and scholars, rather than comprehensive exclusion from it. Indeed, this thesis focuses on the 1880s, when Hellenism was, once again, *a la mode*. As my title indicates, I propose that women's contributions to 'Victorian Hellenism' can be conceived of as subversively Dionysian. Dionysus, the paradoxical Greek god of drama, of irrationality, gender confusion and fervent female rites, can be seen to personify the seditious Hellenism of the women writers in this study. Concentrating on the 'dark side' of Victorian Hellenism, I analyse the appropriation of transgressive, violent female figures from ancient Greek literature and myth, by Amy Levy, 'Michael Field' and Emily Pfeiffer. In so doing, I reveal the extent to which Hellenism was employed as a means to protest against and comment upon contemporary social and political institutions. I suggest that these women appropriated classical female figures in order to challenge the authority of ancient cultural models, by resisting and revising accepted paradigms. Furthermore, I demonstrate that women writers employ transgressive figures, not just as figures of rage, but as exemplars of women's strength, ingenuity and intellectual abilities.

This thesis tracks the various trajectories of influence and the interplay of interests in women's Hellenic writing of the late Victorian period. The writers in this study wrote using a variety of forms and techniques and they differed in terms of their subjects and their intentions. For instance, in 'Xantippe,' Amy Levy exposes the gendered nature of Hellenic discourse, whilst in her closet drama 'Medea,' I suggest that Levy combines her interest in feminism with her concerns about racial and religious intolerance. In contrast, 'Michael Field' focuses on the issues of sexuality and gender. In the volumes *Bellerophôn, Callirhoë* and *Long Ago* Bradley and Cooper can be seen to explore the concepts of (female) desire and pleasure, as suggested by ancient paradigms. Emily Pfeiffer, on the other hand, finds the literary counterparts to her own frustrated desires for social and political equality in the figures of Cassandra and Clytemnestra. Pfeiffer also compares the oppression of women in the ancient Greek world with the struggles of modern British women for social and political emancipation in her fascinating travelogue, *Flying Leaves from East and West.* What these writers have in common is that their Hellenism is woman-centred. Consequently, this thesis not only demonstrates the heterogeneity of 'Hellenisms' in women's writing of the late-nineteenth century, but also highlights the progressive political potential of the discourse of Hellenism for women.

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Contested Ground: Gender and Victorian Hellenism(s)

The ancient classics resemble the universe. They are always there, and they are very much the same as ever. But as the philosophy of every new age puts a fresh construction on the universe, so in the classics scholarship finds a perennial object for ever fresh and original interpretation.[1]

Myths by reason of their symbolic pregnancy and spontaneity of origin, are everlastingly elastic.[2]

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.[3]

"I thank god I was born a human and not an animal, a man and not a woman, a Greek and not a barbarian"—*Socrates*

What we now think of as the Hellenic inheritance within British culture was a Victorian invention. After the first wave of artists and explorers returned from Greece in the eighteenth century, Greek culture became, as Richard Jenkyns suggests, '*à la mode*; art, archaeology, history and philology would have a nucleus around which they could gather, each stimulating interest in the others.'[4] If the Romantics re-discovered the historical significance and the artistic potential of the ancient Greeks, it was the Victorians who adopted Hellenism as an integral part of British culture.[5] Culler argues that, 'it was clearly a habit of mind among the Victorians to perceive analogies between their own day

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[1] Francis Cornford, *The Cambridge Classical Course: An Essay in Anticipation of Further Reform* (Cambridge, 1903), p.19.
[2] John Addington Symonds, *Essays Speculative and Suggestive* (London, 1907) p.313.
[3] Extract from Adrienne Rich's important and now famous essay, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision' [1971], in *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose* (New York & London: Norton & Co., 1975, 1993), p167.
[4] Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p.5.
[5] For discussions of the influence of Ancient Greece on Victorian culture see Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*; R. Jenkyns, *Dignity and Decadence: Victorian Art and the Classical Inheritance* (London: Harper Collins, 1991); Frank M. Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority: Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uinversity Press, 1993); Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (London: Yale University Press, 1981); *Rediscovering Hellenism*, ed. G.W. Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Simon Goldhill, *Who Needs Greek? Contests in the Cultural History of Hellenism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

and various historical epochs in the past and then to use these analogies in conducting their controversies.'[6] Indeed, Bernard Knox observes that, 'the Victorians appropriated the ancient Greeks, imagined them as contemporaries, and used their writings as weapons in their own ideological wars.'[7] By the late-nineteenth century, the period in which this study is focused, 'ancient Greece' constituted a variety of competing discourses.[8] Like Greece itself, in the nineteenth century, Hellenism was ideologically important, but fraught with tension and conflict.

Hilary Fraser suggests that, 'Victorian commentators were acutely aware of the varieties of classicism and medievalism displayed among contemporary poets.'[9] One of the aims of this study is, therefore, to amplify the various networks of interests at play within Victorian Hellenism(s). Of the numerous discourses which Hellenism intersects in the nineteenth century, one of the most significant is that of sexual politics. In the following pages I intend to reveal the extent to which Hellenism influenced Victorian conceptions of gender and sexuality in the work of women writers. That is not to say that gender-related issues are the only subjects of concern. Wider issues of education, racism, spirituality, personal freedom and democracy all intersect with the appropriation of Hellenic subjects by women writers. Moreover, women did not write or generate their work from within a vacuum; they were influenced by the work and opinions of their male contemporaries. I will therefore begin by exploring the influence of Hellenism over British (male) self-definition in the nineteenth-century.

It may seem that the Greeks have always shone a light, or cast a long shadow over British culture, but it was not always so. In the early eighteenth century, it was Latin and the glories of the Roman Empire that were revered as markers of English high culture. So much so, that in looking back, the Victorians (inappropriately) labelled the eighteenth

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[6] A. Dwight Culler, *The Victorian Mirror of History* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1985), p.3.
[7] B.M.W. Knox, *The Oldest Dead White European Males: And Other Reflections on the Classics* (New York: Norton & Co., 1993), p.28.
[8] Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca, 1994), p.59. See also Hilary Fraser, 'Victorian Poetry and Historicism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.114-36, and Goldhill, *Who Needs Greek?* for observations concerning the contested nature of Hellenism throughout the Victorian period.
[9] Hilary Fraser, 'Victorian Poetry and Historicism' in *Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry* (see above), p.116.

century England's 'Augustan Age.'[10] As Culler observes, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries in England, the words *Greek* and *Grecian* carried unfavourable connotations. Indeed, aristocratic leaders (not known for their love of democracy) had preferred the ancient regime of Sparta to that of ancient Athens. Athens was considered 'wanton, too "merry," and given to pederasty.'[11] But, following the excavations at Pompeii in 1748 and the accomplished drawings of James Stuart and Nicholas Revett of the Greek mainland and its architectural treasures, interest in the civilisation of ancient Greece was revived.[12]

On the continent, Johann Winckelmann, Jean Jacques Barthélèmy and August Wilhelm Schlegel, amongst others, aroused new interest and generated great debate about the lives of the ancient Greeks through their own literary and artistic interpretations. But what is most interesting about this sudden avalanche of critical interest, as Jennifer Wallace reminds us, is that at this time, 'the official account of Greece did not yet exist, with the result that these writers were still able to dispute and reshape their ideas.' Furthermore, 'these new ideas of Greece were seen as pioneering and radical, emanating from outside the standard cultural expectations and institutional values.'[13]

By the middle of the nineteenth century, many Victorians felt a close affinity with the glorious achievements of ancient Greece and Rome. For the agents and supporters of England's growing Empire, the political, military and cultural achievements of the ancient Greeks provided a particularly rich point of comparison. In *Lectures on the Geography of Greece,* for instance, Henry Fanshawe Tozer asserted that 'Greece occupied in ancient times a position in many respects similar to that of England at the present day.'[14] 'The battle of Marathon,' John Stuart Mill declared, 'even as an event in English history, is more important than the battle of Hastings.'[15] The appropriation of Hellenism by both conservative and liberal academics and thinkers throughout the course

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[10] Culler notes that the analogy between early eighteenth century England and Augustan Rome was of Victorian origin. But, as Culler suggests, this assertion by Victorian scholars needs to be thoroughly scrutinized, if not revised, p.15.
[11] Culler, p.15.
[12] For thorough recent discussions of the development of Romantic Hellenism, see Jennifer Wallace's *Shelley and Greece: Rethinking Romantic Hellenism* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997) and David Ferris' *Silent Urns: Romanticism, Hellenism, Modernity* (Cambridge, 2000).
[13] Wallace, p.9.
[14] Henry Fanshawe Tozer, *Lectures on the Geography of Greece* (London: John Murray, 1873), p.5.
[15] John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works of J.S. Mill,* 33 vols., ed., J.M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963-91), XI: 273.

of the nineteenth century clearly indicates the importance of Hellenism to Victorian cultural practices and socio-political discourses, as Linda Dowling suggests:

> Victorian liberals pointed to fifth-century Athens and nineteenth-century England— revealing them in their exact and vital similitude. This living historical identity between a specific past and a specific present in turn gave to certain ancient writers— usually Thucydides and Plato were named— their extraordinary power to speak as truly living contemporaries to the English, offering them, as Thomas Arnold said of Thucydides, "a wisdom more applicable to us politically than the wisdom even of our own countrymen who lived in the middle ages."[16]

For the liberal reformers of mid-century, the model of ancient Athens contained all the necessary ingredients for the socio-political transformation of an indolent Imperial Britain. Indeed, Payne notes that Britain's emerging middle-class found the Athenian qualities of self-control, patriotism, education and democracy, virtues to which they themselves could aspire.[17] The study of the classics formed an integral part of the British educational and class systems and much of the confidence of the ruling classes derived from their knowledge of the classical world.[18] In essence, as Jenkyns succinctly puts it, 'the man who knew Latin and Greek was a gentleman.'[19]

The notion of 'gentlemanly' conduct was a crucial element in the appeal of Hellenism. Many tutors and scholars felt that the ancient Greeks, as depicted in the literature of Herodotus, Thucydides and Plato, exemplified the ideals of masculinity and citizenship. Indeed, the warrior-citizens, embodied in the figures of Socrates and Plato, had a particularly powerful grip on the imaginations of the ambitious citizens of Victoria's Empire. Equally as important, and as influential, was the notion of 'republican motherhood,' as espoused in the writings of Margaret Oliphant and Eliza Lynn Linton. As I discuss in chapters two and three, the ancient concepts of citizenship and civic responsibility were as applicable to the disenfranchised subjects of the Empire, as to the ruling elite.

Of course, in terms of the population, comparatively few men received a thorough education in the classics. One thinks of Jude Fawley's painfully laborious attempts to

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[16] Dowling, p.74

[17] Harry C. Payne, 'Modernizing the Ancients: The Reconstruction of Ritual Drama 1870-1920,' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 122 (1978): 182-192. Quoted by Ruth Hoberman in *Gendering Classicism: The Ancient World in Twentieth-Century Women's Historical Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997) p.15.

[18] Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*, p.5.

overcome his disadvantageous background, to scale the walls of the fortress-like colleges in Christminster (Oxford).[20] Class was not, however, the only inhibition to a classical education. Not all middle-class Victorian gentlemen were fortunate enough to have the funds and connections to continue their studies at the Oxbridge Colleges. Yet, those fortunate few men who were taught at schools like Eton, Rugby, Charterhouse and Harrow and who went on to study the classics at university had a disproportionately influential effect on public, and Foreign, policy.

The pervasive influence of the classics on the British education system has been discussed in detail elsewhere.[21] I would like to stress just some of the continuities between the work of the ancient authors and Victorian configurations of domestic and political ideology, particularly with regard to sexual politics.[22] Classical degree examinations were introduced in Oxford in 1807 and Cambridge in 1824. The change in policy was mirrored by a change in approach. In its final form, as Jenkyns notes, 'the Oxford Greats course consisted of five terms spent on ancient literature, followed by seven of history and philosophy.'[23] At Oxford, students were encouraged to find the 'spirit of Greece' between the lines of their grammatical lessons of ancient Greek.

Aristotle and Thucydides were the particular favourites of the influential educationalist Thomas Arnold. Hundreds of young men, first at Rugby, then at Oxford, experienced Arnold's passionate enthusiasm for ancient history and literature of the Greeks. As Jenkyns suggests, Arnold felt that 'the history of Greece from Pericles to Alexander afforded a political lesson more applicable to modern times than did any other period earlier than the eighteenth century.'[24] However, Jenkyns reminds us that the effects of Hellenism on political thinking were not as unequivocally beneficial as Arnold thought:

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[19] Jenkyns, p.63.
[20] Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (London: Osgood, McIlvaine & Co., 1895).
[21] See M.L. Clarke's *Classical Education in Britain 1500-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959). It should be noted, however, that Clarke displays little interest in the classical educations of girls and women. A much more comprehensive survey is Christopher Stray's *Classics Transformed: School, Universities, and Society in England, 1830-1960* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).
[22] Hellenism was, of course, merely one strand which can be seen to have contributed to Victorian domestic and political ideologies. Other major factors were the influence of Christianity and industrial capitalism.
[23] Jenkyns, p.61.
[24] Jenkyns, p.62.

Lytton opposed the unification of Italy on the ground that Greece had lost its greatness when it ceased to be made-up of city states. One of Thucydides' central themes is the bitter conflict between the few and the many ('the nobles and the Commons,' Mitford misleadingly called them), and those who saw England in a Thucydidean light were liable to develop a bleak pessimism. In 1819...during the agitations for a reform bill, [Arnold] argued that Greek and Roman history showed the dangers of premature concessions to democracy...Gladstone was perhaps right to suspect that study of the ancient historians sometimes encouraged "the cruder forms of oligarchic or democratic prejudice."[25]

Gladstone was right. Reading ancient sources young Victorian men, and women, would have learnt that women were excluded from the agora and the Pnyx, the meeting places of the ancient 'democratic' Athenian assembly. Furthermore, women were prohibited by law from transacting business in significant amounts, and they were also barred from appearing as witnesses or litigants in the many law courts located in and around the agora. In other words, what the ancient sources provided was the model of a politics of exclusion, based on sex, class and ethnicity. Indeed, the founding myth of Athens, the myth of autochthony, regarded every male citizen as a descendent of the earth-born Erichthonius. As Songe-Møller suggests, 'the ultimate consequence of this myth is that it denies the woman her right to existence.'[26] The 'spirit of Greece' was decidedly androcentric.

Hesiod's *Works and Days* and *Theogony* have been seen as the primary texts of the western tradition of misogyny. According to Hesiod, in the beginning men lived alone on the earth, in peace and free from disease or toil. But as punishment for Prometheus' transgression against heaven, Zeus inflicted Pandora on the world of men. Pandora brought evil and misfortune into the world. Thus, as Okin points out, 'the fateful degeneration of the human race began with the appearance of woman.'[27] The denigration of women was not just confined to mythology, of course. The Pythagorean philosophers, to whom Plato is indebted for his theory of principles, taught that there are ten essential principles, in contrasting pairs, which could explain the organization of the universe. The pairings included: Limit and Unlimited/ Odd and Even/ Male and Female/ Light and

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[25] Jenkyns, pp.62-63.
[26] Vigdis Songe-Møller, *Philosophy Without Women: The Birth of Sexism in Western Thought* (London & New York: Continuum, 2002), p.6.
[27] Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, 1992), p.15.

Darkness/ Good and Evil. Thus, the Pythagorean Table of Opposites illustrates the apparent opposition between male (good) and female (evil).

Such hierarchical, oppositional thinking is reflected in the work of both Plato and Aristotle, despite the differing tone and aims of the two philosophers. A woman, says Aristotle, is a natural deformity.[28] Consequently, in *Politics* and *Ethics,* Aristotle defends the subordination of wife to husband on the basis that the male is *by nature* superior and the female inferior. For Plato, on the one hand, the female sex was created from the souls of the most wicked and irrational men, and should be considered as little more than the chattels of Athenian (male) citizens. On the other hand, as we will see in more detail in chapter one, Plato's *Republic* espouses a truly radical view of women as having the potential to rule alongside philosopher-kings. As part of Plato's Ideal State, the family was to be abolished.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the new age of Plato was ushered in by Benjamin Jowett at Oxford University. Jowett elected to teach Plato's *Republic* alongside the firmly-established teachings of Aristotle. However, the *Republic,* as Nathalie Bluestone points out, posed particular difficulties to the paternalistic Jowett.[29] Truly a man of his time, Jowett felt that Plato had failed to appreciate the *differences* 'in mind and feeling' between the sexes. In thinking that Plato had made an error with regard to the 'nature' of women, Jowett failed to promote the truly radical potential of Plato's texts. As I demonstrate in chapter one, Victorian women not only had to contend with the misogyny of ancient authors, but with the prejudiced scholarship of eminent professors and translators.

Comparison with the Greeks was not, of course, just the purview of politicians and scholars. Throughout this study I argue that Hellenism was not just the province of the social and political elite, but was extensively appropriated and consumed, particularly in terms of the art, architecture, drama and literature of the Victorian period.[30] Indeed, the classics became available to a much wider audience through the increasing prevalence of translations like Blackwood's series, *Ancient Classics for English Readers* and the

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[28] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* IV, 767b, 775a.
[29] Nathalie Bluestone, *Women and the Ideal Society* (Oxford: Berg, 1987), pp.28-9.
[30] Without doubt, the middle-classes were the primary consumers and disseminators of Hellenism. It is difficult to know (as it is beyond the scope of this particular study) exactly to what extent Greek literature, philosophy and mythology may have filtered down to the working classes. This area is certainly worthy of further research.

seemingly ubiquitous *Greek Anthology*. Classical dictionaries, such as the *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology* (1867) by William Smith, John Lemprière's popular *Bibliotheca Classica* (1840) and William Hazlitt's *Classical Gazetteer* (1851), all made Greek myth and literature more readily accessible. Furthermore, Hellenic subjects were highly visible through works of art, plays and the astoundingly popular musical burlesques. One notable producer of the burlesque was Robert Reece, who, as will be discussed in more detail later, was responsible for some of the most humorous adaptations of Greek tragedies.[31]

Mid-century also saw a proliferation of texts concerned with the study of ancient mythology, including Max Müller's influential *Comparative Mythology* (1856), George Grote's voluminous *A History of Greece* (1846) and J.J. Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht* (1861). Perhaps more influential were the carefully calibrated texts written for schoolchildren, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls: Comprising Stories of Classical Fables* (1853), Charles Kingsley's *The Heroes* (1856) and Eliza Robbins *Classical Tales* (1850), and later in the century, Charlotte M. Yonge's *Aunt Charlotte's Stories of Greek History for the Little Ones* (1880). Much work still needs to be done in this area, but it is important to note that from mid-century onwards the ethical, philosophical and cultural values of the ancient Greeks were employed as educational frameworks for generations of young children.[32]

As the nineteenth century wore on, references to Greek texts and classical myths increasingly appeared in newspapers and periodicals, in novels, poetry, paintings and sculptures. One immediately thinks of the arresting paintings of Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones and John William Waterhouse, amongst others. Also, one recalls the beautiful Hellenic sculptures and bronzes of William Goscombe John, Harry Bates and Sir Alfred Gilbert. Furthermore, as Jenkyns (1980) has so ably demonstrated, the influence of ancient Greek architecture could be seen in almost every major city in the country. In one way or another, the Greeks had well and truly arrived on Britain's shores.

For the critic and writer, John Addington Symonds, all civilized nations were

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[31] The burlesques may be seen as an interesting departure point for an investigation into the transmission of the classics to the working classes in the nineteenth century.

colonies of Hellas.[33] Algernon Swinburne also employed the metaphor of colonization, calling Greece the mother-country of thought and action.'[34] In 'The English Renaissance of Art' Oscar Wilde observes that, 'it is really from the union of Hellenism, in its breadth… its calm possession of beauty, with the passionate colour of the romantic spirit, that springs the art of the nineteenth century in England.'[35] The inspirational 'beauty' of Greek art was, however, a particularly contentious area.

When Nietzsche's seminal study, *The Birth of Tragedy,* appeared in 1872, the prevalent conception of the Greeks was, as Walter Kaufmann suggests, still 'that pioneered by Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) and adopted by Goethe (1749-1832): *edle Einfalt, stille Grösse*, "noble simplicity, calm grandeur."'[36] This view was furthered by Matthew Arnold's famous formulation of Greek civilization in *Culture and Anarchy* as that of 'sweetness and light.' Indeed, it is remarkable just how often Hellenism is described as an intense white light, illuminating the present from the recesses of history. For instance, in *The Renaissance* Walter Pater contrasts the clarity of Hellenism with the richer but glaring colour of the modern world: 'Hellenism, which is the principle…of intellectual light (our modern world may have more colour…but Hellenism is pre-eminent for light), has always been most effectively conceived by those who have crept into it out of an intellectual world in which the sombre elements predominate.'[37] The shining light of the Greeks was seen to be reflected in the luminous sculptures which graced the corridors of the British Museum. But the sculptures did not just have aesthetic value. The political and cultural values of Greek sculpture were quickly identified and modified towards political and nationalistic ends.

The acquisition of ancient artefacts, like the Three Graces and the Parthenon marbles, insinuated a link between Imperial Britain and the Greeks. Furthermore, as Inderpal Grewal suggests, the white marble statues on display in the British Museum

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[32] Hurst briefly mentions the conflation of Christian and Greek values in the compelling children's narratives of Charlotte M. Yonge. See Hurst's *Victorian Women Writers and the Classics: The Feminine of Homer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.42-45.

[33] Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets* (London: Smith, Elder, 1876), chp.25.

[34] Swinburne, *The Swinburne Letters*, ed. C. Y. Lang (New Haven, 1959-62), III, p.56.

[35] Quote taken from a lecture delivered by Wilde on a tour of the U.S., entitled, 'The English Renaissance of Art' (1882). Lecture is reproduced in full, (C.E.L.T., 1997) <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E800003-002/E800003-002.html> [last accessed October 24, 2006].

[36] See Walter Kaufmann's introduction to his translations of Nietzsche's works in the *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), p.9.

[37] Jenkyns, p.147.

were utilized in a particular conversion, suggesting a radicalized conjunction of purity and whiteness: 'the virtues represented by classical sculpture were believed replicated in the people of England; the likeness of the statues were the men and women of England.'[38] The guidebooks of the British Museum thereby represented and reflected the increasing hegemony of an upper-class definition of national culture. Moreover, the creation of a Greek "heritage," that was purely Caucasian and unmixed with Egyptian or Semitic influences, can be seen to culminate in the racist imperialist agenda of the late nineteenth century.[39] As we will see, this issue of (Hellenic) racial purity and national identity is firmly dealt with by Amy Levy in her closet drama, 'Medea.'

Pater was particularly enamoured of the luminosity of Greek sculpture: 'its white light, purged from the angry, bloodlike stains of action and passion, reveals, not what is accidental in man, but the god in him, as opposed to man's restless movement.'[40] Jenkyns points out that, like Arnold, Pater associates whiteness with 'a moral as well as an aesthetic purity,' and yet, the metaphor is also deliberately diffuse: 'Pater associates whiteness with the ideals of Greek art and life…as interpreted by Matthew Arnold…and yet all the while Pater is using it to evoke those naked statues and youths exercising by the banks of the Ilissus, where Socrates expounded to Phaedrus the mysteries of a passionate yet passionless [homosexual] love.'[41] Arnold's fusion of aesthetic and moral criteria meant that the phrase "sweetness and light" was, to use Jenkyns' phrase, 'fatally equivocal.'[42] As a result, Hellenism could be employed as a culturally prestigious discourse through which one could discuss (and validate) otherwise controversial subjects.

As Linda Dowling has demonstrated, towards the end of the century the aesthetes and decadents had appropriated Hellenism for more socially seditious purposes:

> For the historical study of Greece which Jowett so massively influenced embraced both an ethically centered providentialism and an ethically relativizing historicism. With the first insisting on the extraordinary value and relevance of

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[38] See Inderpal Grewal's fascinating study *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), p.112.

[39] For a much more detailed discussion on this issue of racial purity and the discourse of Hellenism see Martin Bernal's controversial study, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (London: Free Association Press, 1987).

[40] See Walter Pater's essay on 'Winckelmann,' included in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan & co., 1873).

[41] Jenkyns, p.149.

[42] Jenkyns, p.266.

the Greek achievement for the English, while the second was minimizing the relevance of English moral categories for the Greeks, such students of Oxford Hellenism as Symonds and Pater and Wilde would find that Greek paiderastia was, through the agency of the Greats curriculum, bought vividly and compellingly to life even as English religious prohibitions on sodomy were simultaneously being made to recede.[43]

Writers like Pater, Symonds and Wilde found in late Victorian Hellenism a powerful, progressive language of social identity and erotic liberation; a discourse which would come to be called the 'Greek movement.'[44] Dowling demonstrates that Oxford Hellenism developed a language that expressed a *particular kind* of male homoeroticism, whereas Ruth Vanita, in line with Richard Dellamora, argues that the Hellenism of Pater, Wilde and Simeon Solomon employed Hellenic models in a more universal, inclusive sense. Yet, despite the claims of critics like Vanita and Dellamora, it is not always clear how the male-identified aestheticism of Pater and his contemporaries can be 'liberatory' for women. As I discuss in chapter two, the reconfiguration of Platonic homoeroticism by Pater and Symonds can be problematic for women as these writers often idealise love between men in spiritual or transcendental terms.[45]

Ruth Hoberman suggests that 'while this association between ancient Greece and homosexuality opened up discussion as to what "Greece" was, it did not make Greek culture any more accessible to women.'[46] The issue of 'access' to the classics is a crucial one, particularly in relation to women. The critical consensus suggests that late Victorian Hellenism was an elusive and exclusive discourse, limited to the fortunate few (males) who could afford a classical education. For instance, Dorothy Mermin suggests that, 'women's access to the classics were restricted in order to keep women out of the club, which was partly defined precisely by that exclusion; and women ambitious for literary accomplishment, just as naturally, yearned to get in.'[47] The gender bias both within the Victorian education system and in nineteenth century scholarship can be seen to be reflected in subsequent critical responses to women's relationship to the classics. But as

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[43] Dowling, p.73.
[44] Dowling, p.28.
[45] Victorian Studies has been dramatically influenced by Foucault's multi-volumed *History of Sexuality*. Whilst Fouctault's theories have reinvigorated critical readings of sexuality in the nineteenth century, his neglect of women and women's issues can be highly problematic. I will discuss this issue in more detail in relation to Michael Field's work in chapter two.
[46] Hoberman, p.16.

Isobel Hurst has demonstrated, the relationship of Victorian women writers to classical studies is more complex then has previously been suggested.[48]

Many students of nineteenth-century literature will be familiar with the struggles of Dorothea Brooke or Maggie Tulliver to acquire a classical education. Jenkyns suggests that the extraordinary women of fiction 'had their counterparts in actual life, women such as Mrs. Browning or George Eliot herself.' Such women, Jenkyns maintains, were exceptional.'[49] Jenkyns' comment implies that Eliot and Barrett Browning were isolated individuals (married to men of letters), working alone within a masculine tradition. But, as Hurst explains, 'by emphasizing the outstanding quality of Barrett Browning's and Eliot's classical achievements, critics endorse the gendered stereotypes associated with the classics: a woman may study Latin and Greek to a high standard but only if her intellect is so powerful that is may be described as "masculine."'[50]

The gendering of Hellenism and classical scholarship as unequivocally 'masculine' discourses certainly had its effects on female intellectuals. In 'An Essay on Mind,' Barrett Browning catalogues who she perceives to be the great poets of literary history. Significantly, all of the poets are male. As Gilbert and Gubar point out, in the same work Browning describes the joys of intellectual discovery she herself must have felt as a girl, 'yet she writes about a schoolboy and *his* exultant response to the classics.'[51] Similarly, Walter Pater's comment that the 'scholarly conscience' was gendered male deeply affected the studious Katharine Bradley. Such self-deprecating comments may be seen as internalized sexism, which, in a literary context, Judith Fetterley describes as a process of 'immasculation.'[52] On a more practical level, as Hurst suggests, women who

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[47] Dorothy Mermin, *Godiva's Ride: Women of Letters in England, 1830-1880* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p.51.

[48] See Hurst's *Victorian Women Writers and the Classics: The Feeminine of Homer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) for a thorough survey of the issues in relation to women and classics.

[49] Jenkyns, p.64.

[50] Hurst, p.5.

[51] Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1979, 1984), p.70

[52] In *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), Judith Fetterley describes the process by which women, as readers, become 'immasculated': 'as readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate male systems of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny,' p.26. In *The Madwoman in the Attic,* Gilbert and Gubar, on the other hand, focus on the 'anxiety of authorship' for the Victorian woman writer.

chose to study the classics often 'measured their progress against the achievements of fathers, brothers, or mentors.'[53] Such comparisons were not only unfair but unreasonable.

For much of the nineteenth century it was very difficult for young middle-class girls with academic ambitions to acquire a sufficiently rigorous classical education. So, as Levine suggests, 'in the absence of good formal tuition, women often organized their own education, either in small interest groups or alone.'[54] Most girls and young women received their education at home, often under the amateur tutelage of governesses or relatives. But, as Breay observes, 'the type of teaching given by governesses was haphazard and those who taught Latin and Greek were unusual.'[55] With the increase in publication of dictionaries, lexicons and translations, it was possible, if extremely difficult, to teach oneself the basics of a classical education at home. Alternatively, girls could join in on the tutorial lessons intended for their brothers.

Some girls, like Mary Coleridge, were fortunate enough to directly receive private tuition in Greek. Coleridge's classes were run by the accomplished Etonian scholar William Cory. Interestingly, Mary, who wrote under the pseudonym Ανοδος, was just one of the pupils to attend Cory's private class. Cory's 'select academy' constituted of fourteen female pupils whom he called 'my lady Greeks.'[56] The classes began in 1886, when Mary was twenty-five, and continued through the next six years, until Cory's death. Other women also sought out mentors to cast an adjudicating eye over their Greek studies. Eliza Lynn Linton read Greek with Walter Savage Landor, Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper were eager to learn from the erudite Robert Browning, whilst Emily Pfeiffer kept a close correspondence with the highly respected Professor of Greek, John Blackie. Mentors were important, but as Hurst points out, 'the attitude of male relatives was crucial to girls' access to learning.'[57] A supportive or encouraging male relative could make or break a woman's desire for a classical education, especially if fees needed to be paid.

Schools such as Queen's and Bedford College for Ladies, established in the 1840s, were fee-paying institutions catering for a middle-class clientele. Consequently, as

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[53] Hurst, p.12.
[54] Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism 1850-1900* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p.28.
[55] Breay, Claire, 'Women and the Classical Tripos 1869-1914' in *Classics in 19th and 20th Century Cambridge: Curriculum, Culture and Community*, ed. Christopher Stray (Cambridge Philological Society, 1999), 48-70 (p.50).
[56] See Hurst's description of Cory's classes, pp.68-69.

Levine points out, 'the accent was rather less on academic acquirement than on appropriately feminine accomplishment.'[58] Indeed, Claire Breay observes that, 'education for middle-class girls was much less developed than that for boys and rarely focused on classics. Girls who did go to school were taught far less Latin than boys and many were taught no Greek at all.'[59] This disparity in educational practice severely restricted women's educational and employment opportunities, as it was often the case that knowledge of Greek was a pre-requisite entrance requirement for public institutions like universities and the civil service.[60]

The findings of the Taunton Commission, the establishment of the National Union for the Improvement of the Education of Women of All Classes (1871) and the Education Acts of 1870 and 1876 went some way towards providing a national system of elementary education. As a result, by the late 1870s, a wave of new schools sought to reform the nature of secondary education for girls. Again, however, class distinctions largely determined the material taught and the methods for teaching. Breay observes that 'Greek was held to be dispensable for girls but important for boys since it was necessary for those who intended to go to university. In girls' schools, Greek was often sacrificed to the cause of a broad curriculum.'[61] Working-class girls attending state schools were principally educated in order to fulfill a domestic role. But in the private sector, as Levine notes, 'a crop of feminist-inspired and feminist-managed schools offered middle-class girls a curriculum almost identical to their brothers.'[62] Despite this move towards equality in tertiary education, girls remained at a disadvantage, as Breay explains:

> Boys at preparatory schools started learning Latin grammar and syntax when they were eight. By the age of twelve, when girls were just beginning Latin, many boys had started Greek and were learning Greek and Latin verse and prose composition. Whilst there were variations in practice between boys' schools, boys usually spent longer on Greek and Latin at school than girls…boys in the highest classical form devoted almost all of their time to classics, often in preparation for university examinations.[63]

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[57] Hurst, p.60.
[58] Levine, p.27.
[59] Breay, p.49.
[60] Greek was a compulsory element of Cambridge University's Previous Examination up until 1918.
[61] Breay, p.51.
[62] Levine, p.30. But as Levine points out, trying to assess the precise objectives of these educational reformers are issues of contention for historians.
[63] Breay, p.52.

The inadequacies and inequalities in terms of preparation did not dissuade young women from choosing to read Classics at university, despite the availability of new Triposes in History and Modern Languages. Indeed, Breay suggests that the proportion of women choosing to read Classics was greater than the proportion of men in the period up to 1914.[64] Clearly, the desire to learn a language, which was represented as an explicitly masculine prerogative, was an irresistible challenge to ambitious young women. From the late 1870s onwards a number of higher educational institutions opened their doors to women eager to study the classics. For instance, Manchester New College accepted female students from 1876, whilst the co-educational Victoria University opened in the same city in 1884. The University of London amended its charter in order to accept women in 1878, and the Association for the Higher Education of Women in Oxford was founded in the same year.[65] Changes had been initiated at Cambridge some years earlier.

Hitchin, later Girton College was established by Emily Davies in 1869 and was soon followed by the foundation of Newnham College in 1871. Oxford and Cambridge universities already differed in their methods for teaching Classics, but the new women's colleges at Cambridge were as equally divided in their ideological approaches.[66] As part of the Classical Tripos, the Poll degree, frequently referred to as the General, the Pass, or the Ordinary, and the Previous Examination, also known as the Little-Go, involved a compulsory examination of both Latin and Greek. The standard required in the Classical languages was considered to be relatively low, but nonetheless some knowledge of the ancient languages was an essential prerequisite for a Cambridge degree. Of course, the study of Classics and Mathematics was, as Tullberg suggests, what was most lacking in female education.[67] Nevertheless, Emily Davies' desire to achieve equity with men on all

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[64] Breay's study focuses on the ratio of female students at the women's colleges at Cambridge, see 'Women and the Classical Tripos,' p.50.

[65] Levine observes that, 'while the campaigns at Cambridge had been spearheaded by women outside the existing academic community, at Oxford the active women were the daughters, sisters, and wives of college fellows.' Consequently, the establishment of Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville Colleges in 1879 constituted what Levine calls a 'consciously non-feminist' parallel collegiate system for women, which had no official university recognition. See Levine, p.46.

[66] For a through analysis of the role of women at Cambridge see Rita McWilliams-Tullberg's *Women at Cambridge: A Men's University—Though of a Mixed Type* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1975).

[67] Tullberg, p.88.

levels of the educational process meant that she encouraged the students at Girton to adhere to Cambridge University's regulations regarding courses and examinations.[68]

Newnham College, on the other hand, adopted a totally different approach to the issue. Under the influence of Professor Henry Sidgwick, Newnham did not force its students to take the Previous Examination, nor did it expect students to keep to the University's rigid residence requirements. Breay points out that, 'whilst Sidgwick aimed at broad, integrated reform within the University and beyond, Davies was more pragmatic. Her action was based on the more immediate need for women to be given access to, and recognition in, higher education.'[69] But as Sidgwick well knew the education of women and young girls coincided with wider debates about the educational needs of Britain's expanding population. Classical education was frequently attacked by liberal reformers as being irrelevant and anachronistic for the demands of a 'modern' industrial society. So, 'whilst the theory of a liberal education was widely supported, reformers argued that its benefits could be more profitably derived from scientific subjects and modern languages than from classics.'[70]

The harbingers of doom also proclaimed that the sudden influx of educated women into the labour market would lower wages and consequently plunge the economy into recession. Furthermore, it was widely suggested by commentators, using a combination of sexism, evolutionary theory and eugenics, that women educated in subjects like classics would refuse marriage and motherhood and thereby jeopardize the future of the British Empire. The self-proclaimed 'feminist' Grant Allen, rehearsing the same argument that Henry Maudsley had put forward fifteen years previously, declared[71]:

> In the first place, the movement for the Higher Education of women, in itself an excellent and most praiseworthy movement, has at first, almost of necessity, taken a wrong direction... instead of women being educated to suckle strong and intelligent children, and to order a wholesome, beautiful, reasonable household,—the mistake was made of educating them like men—giving them a like training for totally unlike functions. The result was that many women became unsexed in

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[68] Davies' desire for parity was further undermined by the fact that the University not only refused to grant female students degrees, but in some cases, male tutors refused to allow female students to attend lectures. For further discussion see Tullberg.

[69] Breay, p.55.

[70] Breay, p.49.

[71] To summarize Maudsley's sexist argument, he suggested that, 'there is sex in mind and should be sex in education.' Henry Maudsley, *The Fortnightly Review* 21 (April, 1874): 466-483.

> the process, and many others acquired a distaste, an unnatural distaste, for the functions which nature intended them to perform.[72]

Presented with the devastating consequences of the higher education of women, it is hardly surprising that women's colleges occupied such 'a prominent place in the public imagination.'[73] Hurst suggests that women's colleges tended to be represented as 'places where talents were fostered instead of being obliterated by domestic duties, or, to more conservative onlookers, subversive institutions which dangerously empowered rebellious women by taking them away from home and giving them a sense of collective power.'[74] For the most part, the conservative argument won out. As a result, the study of Latin and Greek had, for women, particularly negative connotations. Indeed, even when female students proved themselves to be the equals, if not the betters, of their male colleagues, the media reaction was frequently hostile. *Punch* famously published a series of derogatory cartoons depicting 'masculine,' or isolated female intellectuals. Other commentators, like Allen, could not resist taking a swipe at the 'new breed' of intellectual, independent women, who threatened to change the make-up of the established social system.

Some women, however, fought back. In a wonderful article, written seven years after she had left Newnham College, Amy Levy sarcastically attacked the 'prophetic chorus' of critics who predicted the catastrophic social consequences caused by the higher education of women: 'Do we hear the unladylike excesses among the students of Girton or of Somerville Hall? Of the undue extravagance and evil habits of those hard-working and self-respecting bodies?' Levy's article, 'Women and Club Life' (1888), not only challenges the prejudicial commentators, but celebrates the new opportunities afforded to young woman, as a result of the changes in the education system: 'in class-room and lecture-theatre, office and art-school, college and club-house alike, woman is waking up to a sense of the hundred and one possibilities of social intercourse; possibilities which, save in exceptional instances, have hitherto for her been restricted to the narrowest of grooves.'[75] As Levy suggests, networks of educated women existed

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[72] Grant Allen, 'Plain Words on the Woman Question,' *Fortnightly Review* 52 (October, 1889), p.453.
[73] Hurst, p.81.
[74] Hurst, p.81.
[75] Amy Levy, '*Women and Club Life*' in *Woman's World, 1* (1888). Re-printed in New, *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy 1861-1889* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), p.532-38.

outside, as well as inside, the privileged spaces of the Oxbridge Colleges. Women, like Levy, would collect in the Reading Rooms of the British Museum, or in one of the newly formed women's clubs. One did not need a degree from Oxford or Cambridge to gain access to a community of other like-minded women.

Of course, women also socialized and corresponded with like-minded men. In 1885, Karl Pearson established the Men and Women's Club for such purposes. Indeed, it was at the Men and Women's Club that Amy Levy debated the merits of feminist campaigns with Grant Allen. But as Judith Walkowitz points out, in reality the male members of the club often intimidated and dominated the female members.[76] Other women managed to establish much more positive relationships with male artists and writers. 'Michael Field' shared a long friendship with the artists Ricketts and Shannon, whilst Emily Pfeiffer continued a long and fruitful correspondence with Professor John Blackie. The work of late Victorian women writers was, in other words, not generated in isolation, nor within a 'separate sphere.' Consequently, we may consider the Hellenic writings of late Victorian women as contributing to a wider cultural dialogue.

Despite the wealth of evidence, a good deal of recent feminist scholarship suggests that the process of women's feminist re-vision of classical subjects has only really taken place in the last thirty years.[77] For instance, Alicia Ostriker's highly suggestive *The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking,* focuses on the work of American women poets from the 1960s onwards.[78] Whilst in her study of contemporary female novelists, Ruth Hoberman suggests that women in the late-nineteenth century 'were still largely excluded from universities and the study of classical

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[76] See Walkowitz's excellent study of London life, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[77] However, other scholars such as Yopie Prins, Lorna Hardwick and Isobel Hurst have begun to track the influence of Hellenism in Victorian women's writing. For instance, Prins' *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) was one of the first books to analyse, in detail, women's appropriation of classical subjects. Hurst's recently published book, *Victorian Women Writers and the Classics*, is the first detailed survey of the subject, whilst Lorna Hardwick has focussed on the important issue of translation in 'Women, Translation and Empowerment' in *Women, Scholarship and Criticism: Gender and Knowledge 1790-1900,* eds., Bellamy, Laurence & Perry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000a), p.181-203, and *Translating Words, Translating Cultures* (London: Duckworth, 2000b). Kristin M. Bloomberg has also recently written on late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century American women writers use of myth and classical literature in, *Tracing Arachne's Web: Myth and Feminist Fiction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001).

[78] Ostriker does include a useful bibliography on Nineteenth-Century American women writers who wrote on Hellenic subjects. Yet, she is primarily concerned with the 'mythological' work of twentieth-century poets Denise Levertov, Margaret Atwood, Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath and Gwendolyn Brooks, amongst

languages,' and, as a result, 'classical culture represented a world of male power and collegiality denied them.'[79] Clearly, women in the late-nineteenth century did study the classics in significant numbers. And, as I will show, the proliferation of Greek subjects in women's literature from the middle of the century onwards, suggests a collective movement *into* the classical tradition by women writers and scholars, rather than comprehensive exclusion from it.

Crucial to the 'feminist' drive toward equality is the rethinking of history and the struggle for interpretative control. As the number of female scholars who were able to read ancient Greek increased, they were no longer reliant upon male interpretations of the Greek works in question. Women's active engagements with classical texts gave them access to the processes of translation, transliteration, expurgation, adaptation and editing. Perhaps the most significant movement was in literary interpretation, which, towards the end of the nineteenth century, was finally being considered as a worthy discipline in its own right. These developments transformed the relationship of women to the classics.

Furthermore, with the startling archaeological discoveries of Schliemann and the establishment of comfortable tourist trails in Greece, women of the late-Victorian period were eager to enter into a dialogue with their culture's sense of, and representations of, the past. This dialogue can be explored from a number of critical directions, including how women employ and alter the male-authored texts that often serve as their source material, how they deviate from orthodox (male) scholarship and incorporate new ideas for social and political purposes. Indeed, in many ways women's Hellenic writing of the late-Victorian period can be seen to signify a break with a widespread belief in the 'transhistorical uniformity of human nature.'[80] The Hellenic subjects of women writers can therefore be seen as markers of intervention and active engagement with a tradition that is being forced to change, to keep pace with the modern world. With the advent of increased social and educational opportunities and the widespread popularity of all things Greek in the late-nineteenth century, I suggest that women entered into the field of Hellenism and found some profoundly interesting dark materials.

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others. See *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

[79] Hoberman, pp.16-17.

[80] I borrow this phrase from Hilary Fraser who provides an excellent overview of the relationship between Victorian poetry, gender and historicism, 'Victorian Poetry and Historicism' in *Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry* (see above), 114-36 (p.118).

Daughters of Dionysus

The dark, Dionysiac side of Greek drama was re-discovered by the German classicist Friedrich Nietzsche in his seminal study, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). In this work Nietzsche sought to outline 'the hitherto unintelligible Hellenic genius—the phenomenon of the re-awakening of the Dionysian spirit and the rebirth of tragedy.'[81] In richly purple prose Nietzsche declared that 'the age of the Socratic man is over.' Nietzsche attacked the 'shining fantasy' of Apollonian rationality, the 'beauty' of Greek art and the 'illusory' nature of Socratic philosophy. In its stead, Nietzsche championed the tragic vision of Dionysiac art, which he felt forced the individual to confront the 'true' horror of existence. He encouraged his inspired fellow Germans to 'put on wreaths of ivy, put the thyrsus into your hand, and do not be surprised when tigers and panthers lie down, fawning, at your feet.'[82] Nietzsche's groundbreaking study was greeted with derision by classical scholars, such as the young philologist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, on the basis of poor scholarship.[83] Yet, Nietzsche's thesis, particularly his construction of the Apollonian-Dionysian polarity in Greek thought, came to exert considerable influence.[84]

The resurgence of Dionysian Hellenism was not just felt within classical scholarship, however. As Margot K. Louis has demonstrated, for the late Victorian popular audience, it was not the Olympians but the chthonic deities and the Dionysian revels that most vividly represented Greek culture and religion.[85] The celebration of gods like Dionysus, Demeter and Persephone animated not only fin-de-siècle mythography, but also poetry. For writers like Swinburne and Pater, as Louis points out, 'Dionysus and Persephone are both rich with "dark possibilities," chthonian deities with "an element of sadness"...bringing beauty out of pain.'[86] The figure of Dionysus was attractive to so

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[81] Nietzsche, section 20, *The Birth of Tragedy*, from *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 2000), p.122.
[82] Nietzsche, p.124.
[83] Wilamowitz's attack was published in pamphlet form as *Philology of the Future! A Reply to Friedrich Nietzsche's "Birth of Tragedy"* (1872).
[84] Silk & Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.132.
[85] Margot K. Louis, 'Gods and Mysteries: The Revival of Paganism and the Remaking of Mythography through the Nineteenth Century' in *Victorian Studies,* 47:3 (2005), 329-61.
[86] Louis, 'Gods and Mysteries,' p.347.

many writers precisely because he represented multiple paradoxes and possibilities. On a psychological and emotional level Dionysus signifies the free flow of the emotional life, untouched by the restrictions of family, society, or conventional morality and religion. On a cultural level, Dionysus confuses distinctions between city and wild, mortal and immortal, man and beast, male and female, Greek and barbarian, heaven and earth. Dionysus is, therefore, a complex, protean and provocative god, who opens up a world of new experiences, for those brave enough to embrace him.

Blinded by his own sexism, Nietzsche did not foresee the darkly imaginative possibilities made available to women writers by his valorization of Dionysus.[87] Yet, as Nietzsche recalled so vividly, one of Dionysus's formative functions was as the god of drama, of tragic theatre. Jenkyns suggests that the Victorians seemed to have a paradoxical view of Greek tragedy: 'seeming to possess romantic sublimity without romantic indiscipline, they held a special attraction for the Victorians, who were half heirs of the romantics, half in rebellion against them.'[88] In a suitably rebellious spirit, the Victorians flocked to see musical burlesques of the ancient tragedies during the mid-nineteenth century. But towards the end of the century, as Hall and Macintosh have shown, a preference for more sombre, academic adaptations of ancient drama prevailed. Hall and Macintosh suggest that there was a confluence of factors both within and beyond the academy that determined the new vogue for ancient drama in the 1880s, which included the widening of the classical curriculum, the inclusion of women in the discipline of classics, as well as developments within the professional theatre. All of these social and artistic developments coincided with the campaigns for women's social and political enfranchisement.

As opposed to the male-dominated literature of Plato and Thucydides, Knox reminds us that, 'only one of the surviving tragedies has no female character, and the titles and fragments of the hundreds of lost plays tell the same story: women, on the tragic stage, play the active roles, as man's partner or more often antagonist, that real life,

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[87] According to Paul Patton (quoting Hinton), Nietzsche was admired by anarchists, socialists and feminists in the 1890s (1993: xii). He is no less popular over a century on, despite the fact that Nietzsche espoused an anti-egalitarian political ethos and that he frequently spoke of women as the inferior sex. Indeed, the wide-ranging essays in *Nietzsche, Feminism and Political Theory,* ed. Paul Patton (1993), focus on the application of Nietzschean theory in relation to feminism, political theory and ethical concerns.

[88] Jenkyns, p.98.

according to other sources, denied them.'[89] In other words, in contrast to the historical prose documents which are deafeningly silent in terms of women's voices, the ancient dramas are saturated with strong female characters who deliver strong opinions. One particularly thinks of Euripides' heroines:

> In the seventeen tragedies of Euripides that have survived intact, Phaedra, Electra, and Agave kill or help kill a man, Medea kills a man and her male children, Hecuba blinds a man, and Creusa tries to kill one, while on the other hand Alcestis gives her life to save her husband's, and Iphigenia, Macaria, and Polyxena are sacrificed at the altar by men. Women's voices are so insistent on the Euripidean stage that Aristophanes can have Euripides say, in the *Frogs*, that in his plays, "They all stepped up to speak their piece, the mistress spoke, the slave spoke too,/ the master spoke, the daughter spoke, the grandma spoke."[90]

The fact that the ancient dramas were written by men, and not women, nonetheless indicates that the status of women in ancient Greek society was a live political issue, as Foley explains:

> While women in daily life appear to have been confined to the internal spaces of the household, to public silence, and to non-participation in the political life of Athens, women play an exceptionally prominent role in drama. They speak for themselves, lay claim to a wide-ranging intelligence, criticize their lot, and influence men with their rhetoric. They leave the household and even take action in the political sphere denied to them in life.[91]

As Blondell et al point out, tragic heroines are often deliberately subversive and disturbingly belligerent: 'women in tragedy often disrupt "normal" life by their words and actions: they speak out boldly, tell lies, cause public unrest, violate custom, defy orders even kill.'[92] Katz also suggests that, 'in tragedy, comedy, and myth—in the realm of the imaginary—Athenian dramatists and their audiences explored freely both the dangers of female "otherness" and the potential remedies for women's subordination.'[93] However, Zeitlin reminds us that women's limited functions in ancient Greek society meant that they were more likely to play the role 'of catalysts, agents, instruments,

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[89] Knox, *Oldest Dead White European Males*, p.53
[90] Konx, *Oldest Dead White European Males*, p.56-57.
[91] Helene P. Foley, 'The Conception of Women in Athenian Drama' in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Helen P. Foley (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1981), 127-68 (p.133).
[92] Blondell et al, *Women on the Edge: Four Plays by Euripides* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.x.

blockers, spoilers, destroyers, and sometimes helpers or saviors for the male characters.' They might also serve as 'anti-models as well as hidden models for that masculine self.'[94]

At the heart of this configuration of female figures as, 'spoilers, destroyers' and 'anti-models,' are the deeply gendered issues of violence and the expression of anger. As Komar points out, 'violence is a founding feature of the Western tradition: heroes gain immortality through it; nations are founded upon it; families entrenched in it destroy themselves.' And yet, 'violence seems especially disturbing when it concentrates around women in the classical tradition.'[95] In other words, unconventional female figures often carry traditionally negative connotations associated with femininity and womanhood. For instance, Ostriker points out that vengeful figures and 'wrathful deities provide the motivating energy for much of Greek legend, epic, and tragic drama, and without this passion we would have no quarrel between Achilles and Menelaus, no slaughter of the suitors at the end of *The Odyssey*, no Prometheus or Oedipus.'[96] Yet, as Ostriker suggests, 'the articulation of female anger, like female body language, is culturally taboo, and a woman who breaks this taboo does so at her own peril.'[97] To underline her point, Ostriker cites the occasion when Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote the abolitionist poem, 'A Curse for a Nation' in *Poems Before Congress*. The reviewer for *Blackwood's Magazine* felt that Mrs. Browning had been 'seized with a fit of insanity' and suggested that she remember that 'to bless and not to curse is woman's function.'[98]

For women writers of the late nineteenth century, the attraction towards the spoilers and destroyers of ancient literature is obvious. Women quickly recognised that the tragic female figures of page and stage need not necessarily represent female irrationality, or pathological femininity. Revised and re-envisioned, these female characters may in fact symbolize women's ability to fight back, even in some small way, against patriarchal oppression. I suggest that women writers grasped the opportunities offered by the fierce female figures of ancient drama to articulate the disparities in civil status between men and women in Victorian society and the home. By appropriating transgressive female characters from ancient Greek literature and myth, women writers

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[93] Jo Ann McNamara, 'Matres Patriae/Matres Ecclesiae: Women of Rome,' in *Becoming Visible*, eds., Bridenthal, Stuard, & Wiesner, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 77-103 (p.59).
[94] Froma Zeitlin, *Playing the Other* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.347.
[95] Kathleen Komar, *Reclaiming Klytemnestra* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p.1.
[96] Ostriker, p.123.
[97] Ostriker, p.124.

were able to express their rage and desires with a vengeance, without the danger of public censure. Indeed, the tragic women of antiquity allowed Victorian women to express themselves from *within* the boundaries of a prestigious, culturally legitimated (male-dominated) discourse. The challenge for late Victorian women writers was to generate genuinely female voices in their representations of such canonical female figures.

In the work of Amy Levy, Emily Pfeiffer and 'Michael Field' [Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper] we find highly transgressive, tragic heroines such as Medea, Klytemnestra, Kassandra and the Bacchantes of Dionysus. The writers in this study have been chosen because they wrote using a variety of forms and techniques and because they differ in terms of their subjects, perspectives and educational experiences. As such, I not only intend to reveal the extent to which these writers differed in their approach to Hellenic subjects, but I also hope to highlight the remarkable similarities in the work of these women. Indeed, by reading each text in relation to the social, political and literary context, I intend to bring to light the extent to which these writers employed Hellenic subjects as a means to criticise contemporary social and political institutions. Writers like Levy, Michael Field and Pfeiffer can be seen to challenge the authority of cultural models, by resisting, revising and challenging accepted paradigms, both in terms of form and content.

The Cambridge educated, Anglo-Jewish writer Amy Levy was an expert proponent of the dramatic monologue. In 'Xantippe' and the closet-drama 'Medea,' I suggest that Levy skilfully exploits this most psychologically nuanced of literary forms, towards feminist ends. In both poems Levy (re)discovered resources of resistance and narratives of displacement through which she could examine the gender and racial politics of the late-Victorian period and her own status as a culturally marginalised Other. Thus, Levy's Hellenism is self-consciously marked by a sense of minority and marginality. Her Hellenism is also philosophically sophisticated and deeply learned.

Under the pseudonymous identity of 'Michael Field,' Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper announce themselves as classically-informed dramatists. Their literary subjects are more aesthetic than overtly political. Nevertheless, I suggest that in the volumes *Bellerophôn*, *Callirhoë* and *Long Ago*, Bradley and Cooper engage in the very public debates about sexual morality, as part of their wider agenda to instigate a

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[98] Extract from an article entitled 'Poetic Aberrations,' *Blackwood's* 87 (1860). Cited by Ostriker, p.124.

philosophy of experience and pleasure in contemporary life. 'Michael Field's' Hellenism is not, however, purely intellectual. Bradley and Cooper not only appropriated Hellenism, and Dionysus in particular, as a literary motif, they also adopted the pagan philosophy which he represented, in their lives together. So comprehensive was Bradley and Cooper's interest in Dionysiac Hellenism that I devote the longest chapter in this study to establishing my claim that Bradley and Cooper can be seen as the late-Victorian 'Daughters of Dionysus.'

Finally, in the final chapter I explore the political Hellenism of Emily Pfeiffer. Pfeiffer was known to her contemporaries as a gifted sonneteer. In the twin-sonnets, 'Kassandra' and 'Klytemnestra,' I suggest that Pfeiffer finds the literary counterparts to her own frustrated desires for social and political equality. Furthermore, in her fascinating travelogue *Flying Leaves from East and West,* Pfeiffer can be seen to exploit the potential of the travel genre as a form for social and political commentary, by comparing the oppression of women in the ancient Greek world with the struggles of modern British women for social and political emancipation. Unlike Levy, Bradley and Cooper, Pfeiffer did not enjoy the benefits of a university-based education. Nevertheless, Pfeiffer's Hellenic poetics can be seen as equally informed as the work of her contemporaries.

If these writers differed in their personal experiences and ambitions, what they have in common is that they all write from a female-centred perspective. Moreover, these women can be seen to represent the 'dark side' of late nineteenth-century Hellenism(s). As my title indicates, I suggest that women's contributions to 'Victorian Hellenism' can be conceived as subversively Dionysian. Dionysus, the paradoxical Greek god of drama, of irrationality, gender confusion and fervent female rites, can be seen to personify the seditious Hellenism of the women writers in this study. Originating from the regions of ancient Thrace, Dionysus is a foreign god who insinuates himself into the Pantheon of Olympian deities. As an outsider, Dionysus can therefore be seen to exemplify the situation of the woman writer and her relationship to the classical tradition. A transvestite god, who slips easily between genders, Dionysus can also be seen to embody the various subjective possibilities available to the woman writer appropriating the male-dominated discourses of Victorian Hellenism(s). Indeed, the instability and irrationality of gender categories is a major component in the writing of Levy, Michael Field and Pfeiffer. Further, Dionysus is a transgressive god, who, like the classically educated woman

writer, threatens to destabilize social and political institutions. Moreover, Dionysus not only presides over a female community of like-minded women, he celebrates the darker, violent elements of nature and of femininity. In other words, the cult of Dionysus can be seen to symbolize female power, rage and transgression. Whilst J.B. Bullen and others have tracked the male-dominated Apollonian strain of mythology in the nineteenth century, this study seeks to illuminate the dark, feminine, Dionysiac side of Victorian Hellenism.[99]

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[99] See *The Sun is God: Painting, Literature and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. J. B. Bullen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

Chapter One

Amy Levy's Greek (Anti-) Heroines

In 1883 Amy Levy published an essay on one of her favourite poets, the recently deceased James Thomson. The essay is not only an attempt to secure Thomson's posthumous reputation as a meritorious 'Minor Poet,' it is also a strong endorsement of Thomson's philosophical pessimism. Levy clearly identified with Thomson, admiring the passion in his work; the 'hungry cry for life, for the things of this human, flesh and blood life; for love and praise, for mere sunlight and sun's warmth.'[1] Levy also makes clear that Thomson's 'nudity of expression' and moments of 'absolute vulgarity' threaten his reputation as a truly talented poet.[2] Attempting to redress the balance, Levy suggests that one major failing of Thomson was that he lacked 'one graceful finish of our latter-day bards; the pretty modern-classical trick.' He had 'neither the wit nor the taste' to drape his work 'in the garb of ancient Greece or mediæval France.'[3] For a writer who supposedly lacked the 'classical trick,' Thomson was actually well acquainted with classical material. In 1866 Thomson wrote an essay entitled 'A Word for Xantippe,' in which he examines the reputation of the wife of the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates. Thomson invites respectable Victorian matrons to follow Socrates home, in order to 'judge whether Xantippe had or had not the right to scold and rage, and even to pour out vessels of wrath.'[4] He concludes that there is only one living writer 'with genius and learning and wisdom and fairness enough to picture truly the conjugal life of Saint Socrates and shrew Xantippe.' For Thomson, the only suitable candidate was George

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[1] Levy's essay, 'James Thomson: A Minor Poet' (1883), was initially published in the *Cambridge Review* (February 1883), but has recently been reprinted in *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy, 1861-1889*, ed. Melvyn New, pp.501-509 (p.506).

[2] In recent years James Thomson's work has undergone critical re-appraisal. For instance, Thomson's most famous work *City of Dreadful Night* has been included in *Victorian Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, ed. Francis O' Gormon (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). There have also been a number of recent articles on Thomson, including essays by Dafydd Moore, '"The Truth of Midnight" and "The Truth of Noonday": Sensation and Madness in James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night,*' in *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation*, eds. Andrew Maunder and Grace Moore (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 119-34. And, David Seed, 'Hell is a City: Symbolic Systems and Epistemological Scepticism in *The City of Dreadful Night*,' in *Spectral Readings: Toward a Gothic Geography*, eds., Glennis Byron and David Punter (New York; London: Macmillan, 1999), pp.88-107.

[3] Levy, 'James Thomson: A Minor Poet', p508.

[4] James Thomson, 'A Word for Xantippe' (1866) in *Essays and Phantasies* (London: Reeves & Turner 1881), pp. 220-221.

Eliot. Eliot, a fine classicist, never took up Thomson's invitation, but the young Amy Levy did. Levy had the wit, the wisdom and the erudition to garb her own philosophy in the guise of ancient Greece. After all, like Eliot, Levy's liberal education included ancient Greek philosophy and drama, which provided her with another language, literally and figuratively, with which to explore her own philosophical and political concerns. In this chapter I will examine Levy's classical education and appropriation of Hellenic discourse with particular reference to her two long 'Greek' poems, 'Xantippe' and 'Medea,' from *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* (1884).

By highlighting the explicit references to Platonic philosophy in 'Xantippe,' I suggest that the philosophical context of Levy's most famous monologue has been largely underestimated. In 'Xantippe,' Levy cleverly exposes the gendered nature of Hellenic discourse and in so doing directly challenges the 'separate spheres' ideology of the late nineteenth century. The themes of mental anguish and frustrated womanhood continue in 'Medea,' where the foreign antagonist inverts the socio-political structure of the state as punishment for her degradation. Ultimately, Levy's heroines suffer because of their resistance to and their inability to change the misogynistic customs of the ancient Greeks. Nevertheless, Levy reinvigorates the passionate protests of these infamous Greek women, and they stand as forceful reminders of the injustices of a supposedly 'democratic' society dominated by men. In 'Xantippe' and 'Medea', Levy literally re-writes the script of female subjugation, conventional gender roles and the role of the Other in Western culture. In doing so, Levy is herself transformed, in the words of Alicia Ostriker, into a revisionist mythmaker.[5]

It is important to note that until Linda Beckman's recent biography on Amy Levy, Levy was herself subject to much mythologizing. Amy Levy was born in South London in 1861. Her mother's ancestors had arrived in England in the early eighteenth century, where they established themselves in the port of Falmouth. The Levy family enjoyed a high degree of prosperity after striking lucky in the Australian gold-rush. If the family's affluence was made possible by British colonialism, Lewis Levy, Amy's father, was quick to make the most of the opportunities on offer. Levy invested his good fortune in the stock-market, becoming a stock and share broker in the 1880s. As Linda Beckman suggests, the Levys had deep roots in English soil and in many ways the family

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[5] I borrow Ostriker's phrase from her book, *Stealing the Language*, see chapter six.

exemplifies what historians report about Anglo-Jewry at the time, that middle-class Jews lived much like non-Jews having 'become overwhelmingly English in manners, speech, deportment and habits of thought and taste.' Despite their Anglicization, the Levys maintained a strong identification with Anglo-Jewry.

If the Levys were a conventional middle-class Anglo-Jewish family in most respects, they were, according to Beckman, atypical in two ways. Firstly, 'they were literary and intellectual,' and secondly, 'they believed in giving girls an excellent education.'[6] Fortunately for Amy Levy, the pioneering work of the previous generation of ambitious women provided her generation with new opportunities in work and education.[7] With the support of her literary and intellectually inclined family, Amy Levy received a first-rate education, first at Brighton High School for Girls and later at Newnham College, Cambridge. At home the Levy children read widely, encouraged by knowledgeable parents and a governess. As a young girl Levy recorded in her 'Confessions Book' the names of her favourite poets.[8] Interestingly, the list includes a number of accomplished Hellenists, such as Swinburne, Robert Browning, Goethe and Shelley. Levy's admiration was not just confined to male writers however.

As a precocious thirteen-year-old Levy reviewed Barrett Browning's 'Aurora Leigh' for the children's journal *Kind Words,* in which she addressed the issue of inequality in the education of women.[9] Levy audaciously asserts that 'as a poet we see Woman in her most favourable light' and applauds Browning's 'peculiar genius.' Even more boldly, Levy accuses Browning of 'a very common fault,' 'that of introducing too many learned allusions' in her work. Levy reasons that, 'it is perhaps more excusable in a *woman* than a *man*,' for, 'it is only natural that she should wish to display what public opinion denies her sex—a classical education.'[10] Clearly, even at thirteen, Levy considered Barrett Browning's classical erudition as a sophisticated form of feminist protest. In *Aurora Leigh* Browning demonstrated that whilst public opinion may have

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[6] Linda Beckman, *Amy Levy: Her Life and Letters* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), p.19.
[7] See Martha Vicinus, *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977) and Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture in the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago Press, 1992).
[8] Levy's 'Confessions Book' entry is reprinted in Beckman, p.16.
[9] For a more detailed discussion on the inequality in nineteenth century classical education see Breay, 'Women and the Classical Tripos,' pp.49-70.
[10] The brief article won a Junior Prize in the October edition of *Kind Words* (1875). The Article forms part of the Camellia Collection: Amy Levy Archive. Italics in original.

derided 'lady's Greek/ Without the accents,' women could employ classical allusions to powerful effect.[11]

At this early stage Levy was preoccupied with the idea of education for women, as demonstrated in numerous sketches for *Harum Scarum*, the Levy family's own periodical. One particular sketch by 'New Boots' (Amy Levy) entitled 'Ye Woman's Contest' is particularly revealing in terms of the personal sacrifices that Levy felt were required of an intellectual woman. On the left side of the picture Levy has drawn a somewhat unflattering portrait of an intellectual woman, clothed in 'rational' attire. Her face is sombre and serious, no doubt because she has just finished reading Pascal, Mill and Huxley. Behind this studious woman there is a bust of Minerva, who was the Roman patron of artisans, poets and teachers. On the other side of the sketch is a more fashionable and attractive young woman, who is characterised by a bust of Venus. The 'contest' of the sketch is quite simple; in a male dominated world, women are forced to choose between love and wisdom. In Levy's case, she seems to have chosen wisdom. In the Levy archive, there are a few undated sketches which depict female figures in stout late Victorian dress, walking and talking in Greek. Notably, these female characters are not accompanied by any male figures, nor are they presented in any social situation. Authoritative and demonstrably intellectual, these women are not concerned with the demands of wider society. They are, instead, impressively self-contained.

At fifteen, Levy left London to attend Brighton High School for Girls. The School, founded by the feminist reformers Maria Grey and Emily Shirreff, was progressive and espoused a philosophy of women's rights. It was here that Levy was formally taught Latin by Mr. Lomus who complimented the young Amy on 'my Latin generally, and on my translation of Ovid, particularly— said worms often go up for exams with less knowledge than I have.'[12] Levy dutifully completed her Local Highers exams and continued her education at Newnham. Newnham College was one of the newly opened colleges for women and had a reputation for innovation in women's

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[11] This famous quote is taken from Browning's acclaimed poem 'Aurora Leigh' (II, 76).
[12] Extract taken from a letter to Amy's sister Katie, reprinted in Beckman as letter five, p.219-220.

education.[13] As part of her curriculum, Levy attended lectures in Latin and received formal tuition in Greek from 'the worthy Mr. Jenkinson.'[14]

In 1879, just before she entered Newnham, Levy completed 'Xantippe' which became the title poem of her first volume of poetry, *Xantippe and Other Verse* (1881).[15] Xantippe's deathbed confession turns into a cautionary tale about the dangers and disappointments of marriage and womanhood for an intellectual woman. Considering the date of its completion, 'Xantippe' seems to anticipate Levy's time at Cambridge. As a pioneering female student did Levy expect to be included, or like Xantippe, excluded from the highest levels of intellectual debate? 'Xantippe' is directly concerned with the inequality between the sexes in late Victorian society and the poem does suggest that women have been impeded in terms of academic achievement.

In a letter from Dresden, Levy revealed that 'a new poetry club at Newnham was inaugurated the other day with a reading of "Xantippe."'[16] Published whilst Levy was still a student at Newnham, *Xantippe* caused quite a stir. *The Literary World* responded to the volume by suggesting that *Xantippe* was proof of Miss Levy's 'training and opportunities, that there is hardly a line which will not pass muster in the most rigorously critical examination.' The reviewer also speculates 'how thoughts like these will echo in neighbouring academic halls, and how they may mould and modify the feeling of the next generation.' Indeed, *The Literary World* perceived Levy's poetry as representative of a 'new movement' which, whilst it may strengthen 'the antagonism of discordant natures, will deepen the insight and intensify the sympathies of others.'[17] 'Xantippe' can be seen as representative of a 'new movement' inasmuch as Levy directly contends with the issues of representation and cultural power in relation to intellectual women.

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[13] See Rosemary Day's article 'Women and education in nineteenth-century England' in *Women, Scholarship and Criticism: Gender and Knowledge 1790-1900*, eds. Joan Bellamy, Anne Laurence & Gill Perry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.91-109.

[14] Quotation from a letter by Levy to her sister Katie, quoted in Beckman, as letter eleven, p.228-9.

[15] As Beckman observes, Levy's own notes in her copy of *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* indicate that Xantippe was composed in 1879 in London and Brighton, see note 14, p. 290.

[16] Letter from Levy to her mother, dated November 10th, 1881. Reproduced as letter 13 by Beckman, p.232-33. 'Xantippe' first appeared in 1880 in the May edition of the *Dublin University Magazine*.

[17] The review is entitled 'A Newnham Student's Poems,' *The Literary World*, August 5th, 1881.

'Her tender language wholly misconceived': Amy Levy's *Xantippe*

The inconsistencies in Socratic and Platonic philosophy with regard to the education of women have been well documented in recent years. Plato's texts and the dialogues of Socrates suggest contradictory attitudes toward women that can be described as feminist and misogynist in turn. Nathalie Bluestone suggests that a number of eminent Victorian scholars, such as Jowett, Pater, Nettleship and Cornford, flagrantly attempted to square the Platonic proposals for equality between the sexes with contemporary English morality and social convention. Ultimately, Bluestone suggests, 'by downplaying or disregarding Plato's provocative proposals for women rulers, philosophers, whose task it is to question the dominant assumptions, instead reinforced the tendency of the "educated gentlemen" to ignore the matter of sexual equality as an important element of justice.'[18] In 'Xantippe', Levy, like James Thomson before her, refashions Platonic philosophy, incorporating it into her protagonist's tale of oppression and resistance. An initial reading of Xantippe's monologue may not immediately invite comparison with any of Plato's dialogues; after all, Xantippe does not *exchange* conversation with any of her fellow characters. Yet the central philosophical influences of the poem are, as in Thomson's 'A Word for Xantippe' (1866), Plato's dialogues *Phædo*, *Symposium* and *Republic*.

In a striking departure from orthodox scholarship, Thomson quotes lines and episodes from Plato's *Phædo, Symposium* and *Republic* in order to judge, by Victorian standards, Socrates' record as a husband and father. Using the Platonic texts as evidence of spousal abuse, Thomson highlights Socrates' intemperance and selfishness: 'he was an incorrigible idler always lounging about Athens, arguing, questioning, exhorting; chaffing and ruffling the big-wigs in the midst of groups of young swells.' In contrast, Thomson reminds us of the daily grind of Xantippe, who 'in our age and country…would be obliged to go to the workhouse, and the parish authorities would prosecute her husband for not supporting her and his family.' Even if Thomson is forced to admit 'the charm of the symposium,' he draws attention to the remarkable disparity between philosophic dialogue and material reality: 'delivering orations in honour of Love, with his lawful wife at home in her lonely bed, hungry and wretched, and horribly anxious!'

Similarly, Levy responds to the sexism in Platonic discourse by contrasting the failed relationship between Sokrates [sic] and his wife Xantippe, set against the love that Sokrates holds for his male peers.[19]

Thomson's article humorously highlights the paucity of literary criticism in mid-nineteenth-century classical scholarship, whilst remaining acutely sensitive to the methodological problems of how to separate women's subjective experience from the male literary and historical record. The central issue, as Thomson suggests, is that when trying to assess the position of women in antiquity there is little 'hard' data and not much written evidence by women. Therefore, we can only claim to know what Greek men or (sexist) male scholars think about women and how they define them.[20] In order to demonstrate the unreliability and inequity of Xantippe's historical reputation as a harridan, Thomson employs the chauvinist bookworm Dryasdust. Dryasdust is a scholar who seeks revenge on historical female figures for his own unhappy position:

> Bookworm, feeling himself too weak for open and honourable warfare, betakes himself to a characteristic revenge, safe, cowardly, professional, honey-sweet; in the most scurrilous Latin he can command (and Latin is said to be rather rich in scurrility) he libels women and marriage, and retails from the inexhaustible stores of his anecdotage how Xantippe emptied the vessels of her wrath upon the sacred head of Socrates. Xantippe is the lay-figure which he kicks and punches in lieu of Mrs. Dryasdust, of whom he is very properly afraid; he conceits himself, Dryasdust, to be a fair counterpart of Socrates, the sublime imperturbable philosopher; and all the Dryasdust mummies throughout Europe, whose wives do not understand Latin, can mumble and chuckle over the tidbit of recondite ribaldry.[21]

Thomson's acerbic humour cleverly exposes the gender politics involved in scholarship and the making of knowledge and history.

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[18] Bluestone, *Women and the Ideal Society*, p.5.
[19] For a more detailed discussion on the issue of sexism in Western philosophic discourse see Susan Moller Okin's *Women in Western Political Thought.*
[20] See Rabinowtiz and Richlin, eds., *Feminist Theory and the Classics* (London: Routledge, 1993); Eve Cantarella's *Pandora's Daughters:The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), and Sarah Pomeroy's groundbreaking work, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (London: Pimlico, 1975), to name but a few of the recent works in this area.
[21] James Thomson, 'A Word for Xantippe,' pp. 220-221.

Female writers were, of course, all too painfully aware of the male-bias in the construction of history. For instance, in the *New Minnesinger*, Arran Leigh [Katharine Bradley] waxed lyrical about the male-domination of history and scholarship:

> How men have woven into creeds
> The unrecorded life she leads!
> What she hath been to them, oh, well
> The whole sweet legend they can tell;
> But what she to herself may be
> They see not, or but dream they see.[22]

The problem particularly with regard to ancient sources is, as Bradley points out, the profound lack of women's voices describing women's experiences. However, many (male) Victorian scholars uncritically accepted the ancient perspective on women's inferiority as outlined in Greek texts, partly because the ancient Greek attitude toward women so closely resembled their own. Most nineteenth century classicists, as Roger Just observes, unquestionably affirmed that 'in classical Athens women lived lives of cloistered confinement verging on "oriental seclusion," that they were legally, politically and economically, and socially subjugated and suppressed, and that they were treated with an indifference approaching contempt.'[23] Hence Thomson's pained observation of Socrates' wife: 'would that she had left her own statement of the case!'

In accordance with Thomson's wishes, Levy's protagonist is the teller of her own tale, the voice of authority and linguistic control. In recent years critics such as Cynthia Scheinberg have applauded Levy's use of the dramatic monologue as a complex form designed to highlight the psychological and philosophical concerns of a single female speaker.[24] According to Scheinberg, 'Levy's dramatic monologues explore the relation between an auditor/reader's capacity for sympathy and that auditor/reader's access to cultural power, and thus reading Levy's poetry within the larger tradition of Victorian dramatic monologue is like inserting a lens into the critical history of the genre itself.'[25]

Ironically, it is the profound lack of evidence regarding women's lives in antiquity which allows for imaginative (re)constructions of characters like Xantippe. Through Xantippe's

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[22] Arran Leigh [Katharine Bradley], *The New Minnesinger* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1875).
[23] See Roger Just's important work, *Women in Athenian Law and Life* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.4.
[24] See Cynthia Scheinberg's essay, 'Recasting "sympathy and judgement": Amy Levy, Women Poets, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue,' *Victorian Poetry*, 35:2 (1997), 173-191. Also, Scheinberg's chapter on Levy in her book, *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2002).

monologue and Medea's passionate objections, Levy directly challenges the notion, famously expressed by the Athenian oligarch Pericles, that women's art is the art of silence.[26]

The opening scene of Levy's monologue echoes Plato's account of Socrates' blunt dismissal of Xantippe from his deathbed in the *Phædo*. The *Phædo* describes the scene of Socrates' final exercise in philosophy before his death by hemlock. In 'Xantippe' Levy's tragic heroine delivers one last lecture to her maidens in the final few hours before her own death. According to the teachings of her husband, Xantippe, denied lessons in philosophy and metaphysics because of her sex, faces death as an ignorant and, therefore, immoral soul. But Xantippe *is* wise; a life of bitter regret and subjugation has taught her some valuable lessons that she is more than willing to share with her maidens:

> **What**, have I waked again? I never thought
> To see the rosy dawn, or ev'n this grey,
> Dull, solemn stillness, ere the dawn has come.
> The lamp burns low; low burns the lamp of life:
> The still morn stays expectant, and my soul,
> All weighted with a passive wonderment,
> Waiteth and watcheth, waiteth for the dawn.
> Come hither, maids; too soundly have ye slept
> That should have watched me; nay, I would not chide---
> Oft have I chidden, yet I would not chide
> In this last hour;---now all should be at peace.
> I have been dreaming in a troubled sleep
> Of weary days I thought not to recall;
> Of stormy days, whose storms are hushed long since

We can conceive Xantippe's darkened room as comparable with the cave in Plato's *Republic*.[27] It is in this space that Levy spins her tale of neglect, rejection, humiliation, loneliness, socially sanctioned misogyny and the wasted potential of an ambitious and intelligent woman. The interior of her bedchamber is a peculiarly 'feminine' space, strongly suggestive of women's domestication, the interior spaces of women's bodies and psychological introspection. As Gilbert and Gubar observe, 'although Plato does not

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[25] Scheinberg, 'Recasting "sympathy and judgement,"' p.179.
[26] Pericles pronounced the virtue of women's silence in his funeral oration for the fallen soldiers of the Peloponnesian war (Thucydides, 2. 45. 2).
[27] The half-light which characterizes the opening of Levy's poem bears a resemblance to Charlotte Brontë's poem, based on another of history's long-suffering wives, 'Pilate's Wife's Dream.'

seem to have thought much about this point, a cave is—as Freud pointed out—a female place, a womb-shaped enclosure, a house of earth, secret and often sacred.'[28] The doleful darkness within the chamber also reflects Xantippe's deficiency in terms of (male) knowledge. This Greek woman lacks the intellectual illumination of Greek culture.

Levy frequently depicts her characters' moods or states of mind in terms of lighting or light effects, and in this case Xantippe wakes to the 'dull, solemn stillness' of pre-dawn. The low burning lamp anticipates Xantippe's imminent death and suggests that she has lived her life in the shadows. Initially, however, Xantippe's reminiscences focus on the 'sunny days' of her youth. The ambitious and intelligent Xantippe longs for direct, unmediated experience of the world that is unfolding before her. But it seems that she is unaware of her peripheral place in the rigid hierarchy of the Athenian *polis*: 'What cared I for the merry mockeries/ Of other maidens sitting at the loom? / Or for sharp voices, bidding me return/ To maiden labour?' Xantippe hears, yet resists, those 'sharp voices' that seek to control her and her sense of self is, at this point, strong enough to resist the social pressure to conform to contemporary ideals of 'femininity'. She clearly feels that her intellectual ambitions alienate her from her more obedient and more 'feminine' peers, suggesting that she is already conscious of her preference for more 'masculine' forms of employment. That there are specifically gendered forms of labour suggests that gender is not simply a biological category, but an organizing principle in a male-dominated society like ancient Athens. Xantippe's intellectual aspirations mark her out as unconventional in relation to the other Athenian maids, perhaps also suggesting Levy's deep anxiety about her new role as a pioneering female intellectual.

Xantippe tells us that as a young woman she had a 'soul which yearned for knowledge, for a tongue/ That should proclaim the stately mysteries/ Of this fair world, and of the holy gods.' Xantippe's appetite for knowledge and access to the 'mysterious' language of advanced learning echoes the aspirations of a growing number of Victorian women who longed to learn Greek, the language of scholarship and the ubiquitous signifier of 'knowledge'. One thinks of the young Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'ardent desire to understand the learned languages' in order for her to be considered, or to consider herself, as a 'serious' woman writer.[29] Or, one might recall the pangs of George

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[28] Gilbert & Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic*, p.93.
[29] See Alice Falk's article, 'Lady's Greek Without the Accents,' *Studies in Browning and his Circle* 19 (1991), 84-92 (92).

Eliot's Dorothea Brooke who longs for a life of intellectual inquiry. Eliot describes, 'this soul-hunger as yet all her youthful passion was poured; the union which attracted her was one that would deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance.'[30]

Unlike her Victorian counterparts, Xantippe will not be trained in the disciplines of science or metaphysics because as a young woman in the Athenian *polis*, she is not required to know such information to fulfill her functions as a wife and mother. Her youthful aspirations are short-lived, as she becomes increasingly aware that her mind, as well as her physical body, is to be socially regulated:

> Then followed days of sadness, as I grew
> To learn my woman-mind had gone astray,
> And I was sinning in those very thoughts-
> For maidens, mark, such are not woman's thoughts-
> (And yet, 'tis strange, the gods who fashion us
> Have given us such promptings)…

This is a masterful passage by Levy, even more so if we consider that it was written when she was only a teenager herself. The sarcastic tone belies Levy's serious intellectual argument, that if women are physically incapable of sophisticated philosophical thought because of their inferior 'feminine' brains, then why are women socially forbidden to exercise such thoughts? Why do men attempt to regulate that which 'women' supposedly do not have? Why should men, especially enlightened philosophers, attempt to deny the divine in women? And, what, we might ask, would happen if women's thoughts were not controlled? Levy uses Xantippe's sly aside to reveal a deep level of anxiety at the heart of this male-dominated hierarchical society, as she suggests that 'women' are not 'natural' beings, but are culturally constructed.

Nineteenth-century debates about the role of women in society also rehearsed the Aristotelian assumption of women's 'natural' inferiority. Indeed, ardent anti-feminists like Eliza Lynn Linton were so sure that women were unable to successfully transcend their naturally designated roles as mothers and housekeepers that she effectively promoted equal opportunities in work and education. In *The Modern Revolt*, for instance, Linton adopts the language of social Darwinism in an attempt to disprove women's fitness for intellectual work:

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[30] George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin, [1874] 1994), p.30.

> They want to be lecturers, professors, entitled to wear gowns and hoods, and to put letters after their names; and perhaps the desire is natural; but let us call it by its right name— personal ambition—and not to be ashamed to confess the truth: and if they can do the work well, let them, in heaven's name! The Best is not a question of sex, though we may have our own ideas as to who is most likely to be the best. Still, if women like to try their powers, why deny them the opportunity? Public opinion and the proof of experience would be sufficient to prevent an influx of weak incapacity in avenues already crowded by the capable and strong; and the law of fitness would soon find them out and place them according to their deserving.[31]

The transcendental law of the 'Survival of the Fittest' will supposedly find women out and 'place them according to their deserving.' One presumes that that lowly place is back in the domestic home. Whilst Linton condescendingly suggests that women 'try their powers,' Levy asks how one can arrive at a conclusion about women's 'powers' without 'the proof of experience.' For the scientifically-minded Xantippe, only empirical evidence will do.

From her deathbed Xantippe recalls the day when, as a young maiden participating in a public ceremony celebrating the goddess Aphrodite, she first caught sight of Sokrates. At first, and much like Dorothea Brooke's attraction to the unappealing Casaubon, Xantippe's stubbornly optimistic nature persuades her to see 'the soul athwart the grosser flesh' in her husband-to-be. Xantippe also feels, again like Dorothea, that she can see the potential for a mutually rewarding relationship of intellectual inquiry and sophisticated debate with her prospective philosopher-husband. In fact Xantippe's philosophical meditation on finding the beauty within, as opposed to physical attraction and desire, recalls the lesson that Diotima teaches Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*. Xantippe wants desperately to believe that a soul, 'found after weary searching in the flesh/ Which half repelled our senses, is more dear' than 'a brow of beauty.' The irony, of course, is that in the *Symposium* when Diotima instructs Socrates to 'consider that the beauty of the mind is more honourable than the beauty of the outward form,' she is speaking with regard to Socrates' relationships with other men.[32] As Sarah Pomeroy

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[31] Eliza Lynn Linton, 'Modern Revolt of Women,' *Macmillan's* 23 (December, 1870), 146-147.
[32] Plato, *Symposium*, 210c.

reminds us, in ancient Greece 'vulgar love could be either heterosexual or homosexual, but intellectual love could be found only in a relationship between two males.'[33]

The *Symposium* had a major impact on discussions about the future of liberal England throughout the Victorian period, despite the fact that during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the expurgators had been hard at work on translations of Plato's dialogue on love. In 1761, for instance, Floyer Sydenham subjected the *Symposium* to radical modification as he transformed the 'homoerotic' relations into heterosexual relations, consistently employing female pronouns when referring to the object of love. This explicitly heterosexual version of Plato's text became so widely accepted that it even prompted Shelley to adapt the *Symposium* in his attempt to defend the 'free-love' he shared with his mistress. It was not until 1850 when George Burges translated Plato that the general reader in Britain was enabled by translators to appreciate the importance of the same-sex relationships, which are fundamental to the argument of Plato's text. In 1875, Benjamin Jowett translated a number of Plato's works, which superseded Burges' rendering of the *Symposium*. Interestingly, Jowett kept the male pronouns and male relationships that Plato had originally intended, despite trying to obscure Plato's many references to pederasty.[34]

Major mid-century figures like Jowett, Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill, felt that Plato's teachings would help to inspire a new generation of liberal thinkers and that this governing elite would help to save an indolent Imperial Britain from intellectual stagnation.[35] This reverential attitude toward Plato was then enhanced by what Richard Jenkyns calls 'the cult of Socrates.' Mill compared Socrates' 'martyrdom to the passion of Jesus' and Matthew Arnold declared that though Socrates is dead, every man carries a possible Socrates in his breast.'[36] It would seem that Arnold failed to consider that not every woman would be so enthralled with the ancient lover-mentor-hero, Socrates.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a period described by Showalter as one of 'sexual anarchy,' Plato's *Symposium* was appropriated as an apologetic discourse for love between men. For men like Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds the

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[33] Pomeroy, p.7.
[34] Jowett's obfuscations regarding pederasty are somewhat incongruous; especially if one considers that it was Jowett who was largely responsible for the 'Socratic' tutorials for which Balliol College became renowned. See Dowling, pp.76-77.
[35] Dowling, chapter three.

Platonic or Socratic doctrine of *eros* had, according to Linda Dowling, 'already assumed a living reality, as they saw, in the pedagogic institutions of a reformed Oxford.'[37] So the homosocial (and in some cases homosexual) bonds that are reified in the *Symposium* were a matter of fact in the Oxbridge colleges of mid-Victorian England.

Desperate to enter the all-male sphere of intellectual debate, Xantippe deludes herself into believing that the institution of marriage will provide her with the means to satiate her thirst for knowledge. She trusts that a man at the very pinnacle of Athenian society, the same society that refuses her citizenship, education and personal agency, will in fact be her champion. If Xantippe's hope of a union of intellectual equals echoes Plato's radical suggestions on philosopher-rulers in the *Republic*, then her desire for equitable marriage is strikingly similar to John Stuart Mill's proposals in *The Subjection of Women* (1859). In Book V of the *Republic*, Plato's suggests that the traditional family unit should be abolished and consequently, equal opportunities given to women. Plato's ideal state would live communally and the philosopher-rulers would include both sexes.[38] Over two thousand years later, in his groundbreaking work of liberal philosophy, Mill, a self-professed pupil of Plato, suggests that marriage should be 'a school of sympathy in equality, of living together in love, without power on one side or obedience on the other.'[39]

However, Mill's approval of the traditional family unit and his tacit conformity with the attendant roles of women, greatly limited the political potential of his liberal feminism. In his important work of liberal philosophy, *The Subjection of Women*, for example, Mill went so far as to declare that 'woman seldom runs wild after abstraction' but displays a 'lively interest in the present feelings of persons.' Furthermore, Mill states that 'the great occupation of women should be to beautify life…and to diffuse beauty, elegance and grace everywhere'; since women are *naturally* endowed with greater

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[36] Jenkyns, 'Recollection and Recovery: Coleridge's Platonism' in *Platonism and the English Imagination*, eds., Baldwin & Hutton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.201-206 (p205).
[37] Dowling, p.80.
[38] Okin reminds us that neither sexual equality nor justice, in the sense of fairness, were values for Plato. Plato's radical idea of dismantling the family not only enabled him to rethink women's role, but actually forced him to do so. See Okin, especially chapter two.
[39] John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Parker, 1859), reprinted in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.519.

elegance and taste, one presumes.[40] It would seem that even this high philosopher had trouble with the 'nature' of women's souls.

Xantippe's marriage to Sokrates is hopelessly conventional. She describes it as 'that strange day' of 'sacrifice and flowers,' when her dreams and freedoms are sacrificed on the altar of male social dominance. Just when we might expect Xantippe to launch into a bitter tirade against her famously unattractive and indifferent spouse, she tells us:

> Yet, maidens, mark; I would not ye thought
> I blame my lord departed, for he meant
> No evil, so I take it, to his wife.
> 'Twas only that the high philosopher,
> Pregnant with noble theories and great thoughts,
> Deigned not to stoop to touch so slight a thing
> As the fine fabric of a woman's brain-
> So subtle as a passionate woman's soul.

The texture of a woman's brain, it would seem, directly reflects her culturally assigned occupation; women are inextricably wedded to the 'feminine' loom. Levy reiterates the (fabricated) charge of women's intellectual fragility, but now her sardonic tone is unmistakable. Sokrates may well have intended 'no evil' to his wife, but his lack of insight and rigid adherence to (homo)social codes has had a detrimental effect on Xantippe. In fact Sokrates' unenlightened attitude to his wife's desire to acquire knowledge directly contradicts his own fundamental edict, a belief repeated in Plato's *Republic* and *Symposium*, that the dedicated search for knowledge is both virtuous and good.

Levy's application of the adjective 'pregnant' with regard to Sokrates's intellectual labours is an unmistakable allusion to Plato's famous image of the pregnant philosopher as envisaged in the *Symposium*. In one of the most celebrated passages of Platonic philosophy, Diotima, the enigmatic female sage of Socrates' dialogue, emphasizes the need for reciprocity in any loving relationship, that each partner should cherish and nurture the other in order to beget and perpetuate their love. Diotima goes on to suggest that one of the highest forms of love is that of 'spiritual procreancy.' This intense 'spiritual' form of love can only be achieved between men, within an exclusively

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[40] See chapter three of Mill's *The Subjection of Women*.

male intellectual coterie. Theoretically the male citizens who share this intense erotic bond become metaphorically *pregnant* with meaning:

> Those whose procreancy is of the body turn to woman as the object of their love, and raise a family, in the blessed hope that by doing so they will keep their memory green...But those whose procreancy is of the spirit rather than of the flesh- and they are not unknown, Socrates- conceive and bear the things of the spirit. And what are they? You ask. Wisdom and all her sister virtues...But the greatest and fairest sort of wisdom by far is that which is concerned with the ordering of states and families.[41]

Levy's monologue suggests that under these circumstances there is simply no place for an intellectual woman. Indeed, as Luce Irigaray observes, Diotima 'does not take part in these exchanges or in this meal among men. She is not there. She herself does not speak. Socrates reports or recounts her words. He praises her for her wisdom and her power and declares that she is his initiator or teacher when it comes to love, but she is not invited to teach or eat.'[42] In fact, Diotima is merely a linguistic construction for Plato's own dialectic on love. Levy, therefore, is not only questioning and challenging the 'masculine' values of antiquity, but the contemporary male writers and philosophers who threatened to reinstate and thereby culturally legitimize the same elitist and prejudicial attitudes in Victorian England.

The homosocial coterie that is depicted in the *Symposium* is (re)created by Levy in 'Xantippe.' Xantippe recalls a summer evening and a symposium at the marital home. On the threshold of the *oikos,* 'half concealed/ By tender foliage' Xantippe observes 'the gay group before mine eyes.' Funnily enough, the 'gay' group consists of some of the most famous pederasts of ancient Athens. From her partially concealed vantage point Xantippe spies the serene figure of Plato, calmly sitting in the shade of the leafy arbour. Next, she observes the solemn figure of Sokrates at whose feet lies 'Alkibiades the beautiful,' the famous Athenian general. Crucially, Xantippe does not enter or divide this male circle; her peripheral position to this group is indicative of women's estranged relationship to male philosophic discourse and her of lack of influence over political

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[41] Plato, *Symposium,* 209a.
[42] See Irigaray's reading of Diotima's speech in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (London: Athlone Press, 1993), p.20.

events in the *polis*. Xantippe listens closely to the group's conversation and overhears her husband speaking about Aspasia, historically and literally the mistress of the great Greek patriarch, Perikles [sic]:

> "This fair Aspasia, which our Perikles
> Hath brought from realms afar, and set on high
> In our Athenian city, hath a mind,
> I doubt not, of a strength beyond her race;
> And makes employ of it, beyond the way
> Of women nobly gifted: woman's frail-
> Her body rarely stands the test of soul;
> She grows intoxicate with knowledge; throws
> The laws of custom, order, 'neath her feet,
> Feasting at life's great banquet with wide throat."

Levy's provocative reference to the historical relationship between Aspasia and Perikles suggests yet another layer to this complex monologue. I suggest that this statement by Sokrates sharply contrasts with Plato's representation of Aspasia as Socrates' political tutor in the playful dialogue, *Menexenus*. In the *Menexenus,* Aspasia outlines the place of women in the civic myth of autochthony. Furthermore, in the *Menexenus* Socrates declares his admiration for Aspasia's intelligence and wisdom. We should remember however, that Aspasia, like Diotima, is a double construct; first of Plato and then of Socrates. Once again, Levy is playing with reputations. Instead of the open-minded philosopher-hero that Plato seeks to represent in his dialogues, Levy presents Socrates as a racially intolerant misogynist, who is fearful of cultural diversity and female political power and influence. Moreover, the reference to Aspasia, and the more oblique reference to Diotima, constitutes powerful reminders to Levy's readers that intellectual women can be found in the texts of the ancient Greek philosophers.

Sokrates' distasteful image of Aspasia gorging herself on knowledge and wisdom can be directly compared to Xantippe's intellectual malnourishment. For Sokrates, Aspasia's position of power and influence is entirely 'unnatural' and goes against his stratified vision, based on ideas of class, race and gender, of a healthy body politic. He suggests that a woman's 'frail' body is simply not designed to withstand the demands of an intellectual life. If women are not rigidly controlled by social 'custom', they will simply trample all over the laws of the *polis*, causing anarchy. Xantippe, offended and angered by the unjust and blatantly sexist words of her husband, steps forward into the arbour. Her

transgression of the threshold anticipates her next violation of a social taboo; she will dare to speak in public and question the wisdom of the Athenian great and good:

> "By all the great powers around us! Can it be
> That we poor women are empirical?
> That gods who fashion us did strive to make
> Beings too fine, too subtly delicate
> With sense that thrilled response to ev'ry touch
> Of nature's, and their task is not complete?
> That they have sent their half-completed work
> To bleed and quiver here upon the earth?
> To bleed and quiver, and to weep and weep,
> To beat its soul against the marble walls
> Of men's cold hearts, and then at last to sin!"

Levy's re-instatement of a female presence at this particular *symposium* underlines the lack of a genuine female voice in Plato's dialogue. Moreover, Xantippe's interjection disrupts the male-dominated discourse that marginalizes both her sex and her voice; she has decided to confront the biological essentialism of the male philosophers by using their own language to disprove their reasoning. The (typically anti-feminist) suggestion that women are 'half-completed work' of the gods, that they are 'too fine, too subtly delicate' to live alongside men on an equal basis, is presented here in terms of blasphemy. Xantippe eloquently unravels Sokrates' dubious supposition that women are sent to earth as failed experiments of the gods, with some ease. As Xantippe's speech suggests, it would seem that with regard to evaluating women's capabilities, the philosophers are again guilty of ignoring their own lessons.

Dismayed by the ensuing silence, Xantippe looks about and finds the face of Plato, who 'half did smile and half did criticise.' Plato's ambivalent reaction directly reflects his contradictory attitude toward women, as outlined in his texts. Xantippe then finds the scornful face of Alkibiades, who 'with laughing lips' shrugs his snowy shoulders, 'till he brought the gold/ Of flowing ringlets round about his breasts.' In this instance, Alkibiades' effeminacy only seems to reinforce Xantippe's exclusion from this male arena and from male structures of power. Her alien status is further underlined when Sokrates asks: 'prythee tell/ From what high source, from what philosophies/ Didst cull the sapient notion of thy words?'

Xantippe is literally struck dumb by her husband's belittling response. He is fully aware that as an Athenian wife, Xantippe has been denied access to the philosophical education of her male peers. Sokrates's cutting remarks also suggests that rather than being a transcendental discourse, philosophy is indicative of gender difference. Xantippe is momentarily 'crushed with all that weight of cold contempt,' before angrily throwing the wineskins that she holds upon the floor. The wine that is spilt over Xantippe's robes indicates that the silenced woman has been sacrificed to ensure the continuity of male social dominance. However, we may also interpret the spilt wine as a Dionysian symbol. The stained marble highlights the flaws inherent in Athenian 'democracy,' and Xantippe's violent opposition to traditional socio-political structures of power. The spilt wine, an obvious sign of her frustration, also demonstrates Xantippe's autonomy and self-assertion. Yet, as the (menstrual) wine stain on her robes signifies, her gender excludes her from adequately responding to her husband's taunts. Xantippe's social position is too weak to completely disrupt the masculine order.

Nevertheless, Xantippe's 'fierce acceptance' cannot be construed as acquiescence with power structures of ancient Athens. She remains strong enough to keep disputing her husband's authority and her obvious discontent and powerful protestations disprove the claim for the superiority of Athenian social harmony and order. Xantippe's reputation as a bitter and dissatisfied wife indicates that Sokrates has failed in his roles as pedagogue and paterfamilias. By his own standards, he is an unsuccessful citizen of the Athenian *polis*. 'Xantippe,' therefore, invalidates male claims to 'masculine' superiority by exposing the hypocrisy and gender-bias of much Western philosophical discourse.

Despite the sense of remorse in the closing lines, Levy ends her monologue on a positive note when, like the released prisoner from Plato's metaphorical cave, Xantippe stretches toward the dawn, an enlightened being. If there is a moral to Xantippe's cautionary tale, it is for young women to avoid marriage and to become educated critics. As Levy knew herself, women have to learn the terms of male discursive practice, before they can change it. 'Xantippe' also appeals for female solidarity and the need to create new communities, based on education and knowledge. However, Xantippe's verbal assaults against Socrates mark her out as a figure of angry protest, rather than a figure of reform. Xantippe is a truly tragic figure in that she articulates the frustrations and disappointments of a wasted life. Yet, Xantippe can also be seen as a successfully

subversive figure. Refusing to silently acquiesce to her fate, Levy's Xantippe stands as a reminder of women's mental strength, tenacity and ability to represent themselves. Tragic and transgressive, Xantippe is a worthy precursor to Levy's next Hellenic (anti-) heroine, Medea.

Hellenism and Anarchy: Levy's *Medea*

And now without the barbarians what will become of us? Those people were a kind of solution.

—C.P. Cavafy[43]

If, as the reviewer of *The Literary World* suggested, 'Xantippe' was designed to 'intensify the sympathies of others,' then Levy's re-telling of the story of 'Medea' *demands* empathy and understanding. In 1882 Amy Levy completed 'Medea' which she describes as a 'Fragment in Dramatic Form.' The dramatic fragment forms an integral part of Levy's second volume of poetry, *A Minor Poet and Other Verse,* published in 1884. As a whole, Levy's collection is strongly influenced by German literature, including the work of the notable Hellenists, Heine and Goethe. 'Medea', however, may well owe a specific debt to the Austrian playwright Franz Grillparzer. Grillparzer's *Medea,* which forms part of his dramatic trilogy *Das Goldene Vließ* (1821) [The Golden Fleece] is a sympathetic portrayal of the Colchian princess, who is derided by the Greeks for her ethnic difference. I suggest that Levy's Medea can be seen as a combination of the powerful personality and psychology of Euripides' Medea and Grillparzer's racially orientated representation. Through the figure of Medea, Levy is able to articulate her anxieties concerning her Anglo-Jewish identity and her feminist beliefs. Amy Levy's 'Medea' should, I suggest, be read not only as a cautionary tale concerning the disavowed and disenfranchised but also as another highly significant contribution in feminist-revisionist mythmaking.

The sub-title to Levy's 'Medea' states that the dramatic fragment is 'After Euripides' and as such there are a number of similarities, as well as crucial differences, between the dramas. The first and most obvious difference is that of form. There are few

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[43] The quotation is from the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy (1863–1933). See Cavafy's 'Waiting for the Barbarians,' (1904), in *The Complete Poems of Cavafy*, trans., Rae Dalven & intro., by W.H. Auden (New York: Brace & World, 1961).

stage directions in Levy's drama and the text consists of only two main scenes and has only four main characters. However, Levy does include a couple of conspicuous details in the formal arrangement of the 'dramatic fragment.' Against tradition, Medea is identified as a citizen of Corinth and the first scene takes place before 'Medea's House,' suggesting Medea's agency and subjectivity. Levy also dispenses with many of the visually arresting stage-devices, such as the spectacular *dues ex machina*, the golden dragon-chariot, which 'rescues' Medea at the end of Euripides's play. Indeed, in keeping with her humanistic approach, Levy resists Euripides's representation of Medea as semi-divine. She also omits the Chorus of Corinthian Women and the crucial figure of the Nurse from her drama. Levy was technically accomplished, so her decision to depart from classical forms should be seen as deliberate and in keeping with her intentions for the volume. Consequently, I suggest that Levy's verse-drama was not intended to be performed on stage.

Levy's 'Medea' can however be seen in accordance with tradition of closet dramas written by women during the nineteenth century, such as Augusta Webster's 'A Woman Sold' and George Eliot's *Armgart.* As Susan Brown points out, closet drama was a particularly useful form for Victorian women writers as, like the monologue, the 'dramatic form presents women as speakers, as actors, as agents, in a way that lyric or third-person narrative poetry cannot.' Closet drama also 'portrays the constraints imposed by social context and the way that women's actions are shaped by such forces; women are also thus clearly reactors, social creatures rather than unfettered subjects.'[44] Closet drama not only allows female characters subjectivity and an unmediated voice in the text, it also reveals the intricacies and subtleties of character, which may be lost in other forms. Brown also makes the important point that the closet drama form anticipates the representational strategies of the Actresses' Franchise League and of the Women's Social and Political Union in the early twentieth century, which devised plays about women's position, to bring the issues alive.

However, as a genre, closet drama can also be problematic for women writers. As Brown points out, it is often very difficult to know if an author *intended* a work to be read as an entirely textual production, or whether issues arising from reception or audience

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[44] Susan Brown, 'Determined Heroines: George Eliot, Augusta Webster, and Closet Drama by Victorian Women' in *Victorian Poetry,* 33:1 (1995), 89-109 (104).

determined the work's status as a 'closet drama.'[45] Considering that female playwrights found it extremely difficult to have their work staged in the nineteenth century, the problems in relation to 'Closet Drama' for women writers are not insubstantial. Yet, unlike Michael Field and Emily Pfeiffer, there is no evidence to suggest that Levy wished to have her work performed on stage. Levy's use of closet drama is, I suggest, not only an attempt to find a suitable literary form to represent the complex social issues facing contemporary women, but also an attempt to meet the aesthetic challenge of representing women as 'determined heroines.'[46] There is, of course, no more determined heroine than Medea.

'Medea' is positioned alongside two long monologues in Levy's second collection of verse. 'A Minor Poet,' 'Xantippe' and 'Medea' are all character studies, focused on the psychological sufferings of outcast figures. Importantly, the three poems are separated from the 'other verse' that follows, forming a sort of triptych of philosophical pessimism. I suggest that Levy retains only the bare essentials of Euripides' drama in order to highlight the origins of Medea's psychological pain. Indeed, the first act of Levy's dramatic fragment focuses on Medea's ethnicity and Jason's betrayal and the second act relays, through an intermediary, Medea's act of infanticide. What emerges from this dramatic fragment is a sympathetic portrait of a woman compelled by her own nature and by circumstance to act against her intolerable maltreatment at the hands of a hostile society.

It is important to note that before her re-presentation of 'Medea,' Levy was interested in the social and political persecution of ethnic minorities. Linda Beckman suggests that Levy avoided Jewish topics in her published fiction until 1888, when she produced the controversial novel on contemporary Anglo-Jewry, *Reuben Sachs*.[47] However, at the age of fifteen, Levy wrote the poem 'Run to Death,' which was published in the feminist journal, *Victoria Magazine*. The poem is about a gypsy woman who is hunted, together with her baby, by a group of French noblemen. Set in pre-revolutionary France, the poem details the persecution of a woman who is de-humanized and persecuted because of her class, her sex and her ethnicity. Consequently, we may see

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[45] See notes three and four to Brown's article 'Determined Heroines,' 106.
[46] I'm paraphrasing Brown's title here.
[47] See Beckman, p.1.

'Run to Death' as a forerunner of 'Medea,' in which prejudice against vulnerable members of ethnic groups is a driving concern.

As an Anglo-Jewish woman writer, Levy was particularly well-positioned to examine the difficulties involved in immigration and assimilation. Indeed, from a young age Amy Levy seems to have struggled with her Anglo-Jewish identity. At times, she firmly and happily locates herself within the Jewish community. At other moments Levy can be seen to be at best ambivalent, if not unsympathetic, toward other Jews. Some commentators have suggested that Levy suffered from Jewish self-hatred which contributed to her suicide at the age of twenty-seven.[48] Levy may have struggled with her identity as a young woman, but Levy's Jewishness cannot be seen as a major factor in her depression. Levy's re-vision of 'Medea' can, however, be seen as an important development in Levy's career. Through the figure of Medea Levy is able to articulate the difficulties of being both a young intellectual woman and a culturally marginalized Other in the late nineteenth century.

Perhaps second only to the figure of Clytemnestra, Medea is the most famous antagonist created by the Greek poets. As a sorceress, guilty of fratricide and infanticide, Medea naturally poses serious difficulties to Victorian notions of propriety and containment. According to various traditions, Medea's saga begins in Colchis, the kingdom of her father Aeëtes. Medea falls in love with the Greek Argonaut Jason, whom she helps, with the aid of magic, to steal the Golden Fleece. After she betrays her father and kills her brother, Apsyrtus, Medea and Jason flee to Corinth where, living as husband and wife, Medea bears Jason two sons. Jason, who has ambitions toward the throne, resolves to wed the King of Corinth's daughter and to exile Medea and his sons from Corinth. Medea, outraged at Jason's betrayal, determines to take her revenge on her perfidious spouse, by murdering the King, the princess and her own two sons. Multiple versions of Medea's story existed in antiquity, but it is the ancient Greek playwright Euripides who has been credited with the 'invention' of the mother who killed her children.[49] Levy (re)appropriates Euripides's notorious antagonist but her drama is also a radical departure from Euripides's version of the Medea myth. As well as a complex

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[48] See Todd Endelman's assessment of Levy in *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2002), p.170.

character study, Levy's play combines Hellenism, feminism and references to antisemitism as part of her examination of contemporary social and political institutions. If Xantippe is the intellectual woman who philosophically laments her degraded state, then Medea is the intelligent foreign woman who takes decisive action against her humiliation.

Medea is a conspicuous figure in Victorian theatre, music and literature from mid-century, despite Euripides' somewhat contentious reputation. The denigration began in ancient Greece when in the *Themophoriazusai* the ancient Greek comic Aristophanes (in jest) accused Euripides of misogyny. As Michelini points out, the critical barrage continued in the nineteenth century with Schlegel and Nietzsche, who recited the charge originally made by Aristophanes in the *Frogs*, that Euripides was responsible for 'killing' tragedy. Euripides was also denounced by various Victorian moralists for his philosophical complexity and moral degeneracy.[50] Despite the fact that *Medea* was awarded last place by the Athenian judges and that Euripides won only five contests (one posthumously) in the dramatic competition of the Greater Dionysia, evidence suggests that the ancient Greek public 'adored Euripides like a god.'[51] Euripides' popularity actually continued well into the nineteenth century, as testified by the many translations, reproductions and appropriations of his work.

One of the most notable Victorian representations of an enraged Medea was Augusta Webster's acclaimed monologue 'Medea in Athens,' published as part of her volume *Portraits* in 1870. Webster had in fact produced a scholarly translation of Euripides' *Medea* in 1868. In 'Medea in Athens' however, Webster, a dedicated campaigner for women's rights, (re)presents a strong, triumphal Medea, unrelenting in her 'virulent hate' against the faithless Jason. Levy knew Webster's work well and her

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[49] For a more detailed explanation of Euripides' original contributions to the Medea myth see Emily McDermott's *Euripides' Medea: The Incarnation of Disorder* (University Park & London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), chapter one.

[50] Both Friedrich and A.W. Schlegel denounced Euripides in these terms. For a full discussion of Euripides' critical reputation see Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

[51] Erich Segal directly cites *Paideia* i. 380, and indirectly *Nicias* 29 where Plutarch tells the story of how Greek sailors, captured in Sicily, gained their freedom by being able to quote Euripides. See Segal's 'Euripides: Poet of Paradox' in *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy*, ed., Erich Segal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 244- 253 (p.252).

use of the dramatic monologue strongly resembles that of Webster.[52] Interestingly, Webster wrote a short poem, dedicated to Levy on the event of her death.

Other women writers were also eager to rehabilitate Medea as a proto-feminist icon. For instance, George Eliot repeatedly returns to the Medea myth in *Adam Bede* (1859), *Felix Holt* (1866) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876). In *Adam Bede* the hapless Hetty Sorel commits the murder of her infant, after being abandoned by the squire's grandson, Arthur Donnithorne. As Josephine McDonagh points out, 'Hetty's child murder is an attribute of her dissident sexuality, the most extreme manifestation of a wild, transgressive desire that threatens the stability of the emerging bourgeois society.'[53] The sensuous, pleasure-seeking Hetty is found guilty of murder and banished from the community which perceives her to be a threat. Furthermore, as McDonagh astutely points out, Hetty's act of infanticide is not only topical and socially realistic but also signifies wider cultural anxieties: 'it is also a highly charged oriental event, an over-determined sign of a barbarous threat, and one, moreover, that bears memories of the other instances in which national boundaries and national authority had been brought under critical review.'[54] Eliot persisted with her allusions to Medea as can be seen from her portrayals of Mrs. Transome in *Felix Holt* and Lydia Glasher in *Daniel Deronda*. Both spurned mistresses, Transome and Glasher reflect Medea's rage at being abandoned by the perfidious Jason. Indeed, both *Felix Holt's* Jermyn and *Daniel Deronda's* Grandcourt are identified as Jason-like figures. And, as McDonagh suggests, in *Daniel Deronda*, 'George Eliot uses the figure of Medea through which to associate women's righteous anger with their world with their situation as outsiders, the disenfranchised of society, analogous with the Jews.'[55] Interestingly, as Edith Hall observes, such representations of Medea also coincide with a trend toward sensation fiction in the 1860s and 1870s.[56] The best-selling novels of Ellen Wood and Elizabeth Braddon, for instance, feature unconventional and assertive heroines, who bear an uncanny resemblance to Euripides' ancient antagonist.

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[52] Beckman compares Levy's poetic technique with that of Webster on a number of occasions.
[53] Josephine McDonagh, *Child Murder and British Culture 1720-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.128.
[54] See chapter five in McDonagh's *Child Murder.*
[55] McDonagh, p.168.
[56] Edith Hall, 'Medea and British Legislation Before the First World War' in *Greece and Rome*, 46:1 (1999), 42-77 (66).

Plate I, Frederick Sandys' *Medea* (1869)

Later in the century, Vernon Lee, in 'Amour Dure' (1890), Mona Caird, in *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894) and George Egerton in 'Wedlock' (1893) also exploited the feminist potential of the Medea myth, in their own portrayals of rebellious women.[57] Following the examples of Algernon Charles Swinburne and William Morris, Michael Field, the pseudonymous identity of Edith Cooper and Katharine Bradley, produced a poem from the perspective of Jason. Medea is mentioned in Field's poem, only to say that after her act of infanticide she 'is gone/ To her own land.' Jason, in contrast, is depicted in his final moments, a ruined and pathetic soul, punished for his vanity and arrogance.[58]

Frederick Sandys, an associate of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, depicted one of the most famous representations of Medea in mid-century. Sandys's beautiful representation caused a sensation when it was submitted to the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in 1869 (Plate I). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the painting, of a sorceress who commits infanticide, was ultimately rejected from the Exhibition. Other images of Medea appeared in England and in Europe in throughout the nineteenth century, including paintings by Valentine Prinsep (1888) and Evelyn Pickering De Morgan (1889).[59] De Morgan's portrait of Medea can be read alongside her other paintings of famous women from antiquity such as *Clytie, Flora, Helen* and *Cassandra* (see Plate VI). As Smith observes, De Morgan's artistic output during this period 'seems to have been partly orientated around creating a gallery of powerful women.'[60] The French painter Eugene Delacroix also produced a powerful picture of Medea with her children in 1838, whilst the German neoclassical painter Anselm Feuerbach produced an emotive image of 'Medea' (also with children) in 1870.[61]

Medea also made repeated appearances on stage during the period. As Fiona Macintosh observes, the sudden proliferation of new versions of *Medea*—both tragic and burlesque—in mid-century coincided with public debates regarding the divorce laws and

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[57] For a discussion of Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus* and Lee's 'Amour Dure' see Ann Heilmann's *New Woman Strategies* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), chapter six.
[58] See Michael Field's *Dedicated: An Early Work* (1914), part II.
[59] Interestingly, De Morgan included a quote from Morris's *Life and Death of Jason* (1867) when she exhibited her painting at the New Gallery in 1890. See Elise Lawton Smith's *Evelyn Pickering De Morgan and the Allegorical Body* (London: Associated University Presses, 2002), for more detail.
[60] See Smith, *Evelyn Pickering De Morgan,* p.100.
[61] Delacroix's 'Medea about to Kill Her Children' (1838) captures Medea clasping her children and a dagger, as she looks over her shoulder seemingly in fear of violent pursuers. The painting can be seen to represent Medea's infanticide not as outright murder, but as an act of maternal protection.

the enfranchisement of women in England.[62] For example, after months of impassioned debate, the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act was passed in the August of 1857. Hall suggests that 'in legalizing divorce for ordinary people,' the bill 'remains the most important landmark in British marriage law.'[63] Furthermore, as Hall observes, 'during the years 1856 to 1857 Medea, the abandoned wife and mother of Greek mythology, became one of the most ubiquitous heroines on the London stage.'[64] A particularly successful burlesque version of Medea's story was produced by Robert Brough in 1856. Humorously entitled *The Best of Mothers, with a Brute of a Husband*, the joke not only refers to the infanticidal Medea, but, as Hall points out, to 'yet another legislative controversy concerned with marriage, the long-running attempt to remove the ban on a man marrying his deceased wife's sister.'[65] In the same year Mark Lemon produced another burlesque, this time titled, *Medea; or, A Libel on the Lady of Colchis*. Later, in 1876, an adaptation of Grillparzer's Medea was staged at the Haymarket in London. On this occasion the tempestuous Czech-born actress Francesca Janauschek was contracted to play the role of the barbarian Medea. Unlike the productions of twenty-years earlier, this Medea was not played for laughs.

As the century wore on, Medea was increasingly appropriated for political purposes. Euripides' version of the myth was considered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as a particularly potent force in representing women's desires for liberation. An anonymous reviewer spoke of the great tragedian in the following terms:

> Does he not, with Prof. Gilbert Murray for interpreter, find his natural place on our stage by the side of our newest and brainiest dramatists? Is he not familiar to all Fleet Street as the 'Greek Ibsen,' the 'Attic Shaw'? Are not his plays an inexhaustible mine of tags for the Feminist and other workers for Great Causes?[66]

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[62] See Macintosh's informative article, 'Medea Transposed: Burlesque and Gender on the Mid-Victorian Stage' in *Medea in Performance* 1500-2000, eds., Hall, Macintosh, Taplin (Oxford: Legenda, 2000a), pp. 75-99.
[63] Hall, 'Medea and British Legislation,' p.61.
[64] Hall, 'Medea and British Legislation,' p.56.
[65] See note fifty-seven to Hall & Macintosh's, 'Medea and Mid-Victorian Marriage Legislation,' in *Greek Tragedy and British Theatre1660-1914* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005a), p.408.
[66] Hall, 'Medea and British Legislation,' p.42.

The notable translator of Euripides, Gilbert Murray, a fellow of New College, Oxford, and later the Regius Professor of Greek, recognised the potential for the feminist revisionism of Euripides' great tragedy, as Edith Hall suggests:

> Although Murray was later to distance himself from the militant wing of the women's suffrage movement, he had supported it aims since 1889. He believed that the ancient Greeks were "the first nation that realised and protested against the subjection of women" and the actress Sibyl Thorndike recalled him saying that Medea 'might have been written' for the women's movement.[67]

It certainly seemed to be. As Hall and Macintosh point out, Medea's famous speech to the 'Women of Corinth' formed part of the repertoire of the Actresses' Franchise League at suffragette meetings.[68] Levy actually omits this speech from her drama, but includes an extract from the speech as an epigraph, indicating that Levy's 'Medea' should be read in terms of contemporary debates about the status of women in society. The epigraph to Levy's dramatic fragment can be translated as, 'Of all those beings capable of life and thought, we women are most miserable of living things.'[69] Yet, as Bernard Knox observes, '*Medea* is not about women's rights; it is about women's wrongs.'[70] Levy also presents Medea's tragedy in terms of moral and social justice, rather than political reform. Nevertheless, Levy's verse-drama should be seen as a response to the social and political circumstances of her time.

Clearly fascinated by another disreputable and demonized female character, Levy completed 'Medea' in Lucerne in the summer of 1882. The previous year Levy had decided, after two years of hard study at Newnham, to continue her education abroad.[71] Whilst in Germany, Levy kept an eye on the reviews of *Xantippe* and continued to study Greek, under the tutelage of a 'Cambridge man.' At this time, Levy's continued interest in Greek subjects collided with her hyper awareness of and disturbing ambivalence

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[67] Hall, 'Medea and British Legislation,' p.43.
[68] See Hall's, 'Medea and British Legislation,' p45-46; Macintosh, 'The Performer in Performance,' in *Medea in Performance 1500-2000* (see Macintosh above), pp.1-31 (p.18).
[69] Translation of *Medea* , lines 230-231, by Ruby Blondell in *Women on the Edge: Four Plays by Euripides*, eds. Blondell et al (London: Routledge, 1999).
[70] B.M.W., Knox, 'The *Medea* of Euripides,' *Yale Classical Studies* XXV (1977), .211.
[71] Levy's letters from Cambridge indicate that she greatly enjoyed the camaraderie of college life, but her later writings indicate that life at Cambridge could be difficult for both women and Jews. As Beckman points out, Levy's unpublished short story 'Reading' reveals the inherent sexism of Cambridge culture, 39-40. 'Leopold Leuniger: A Study' and 'Cohen of Trinity,' on the other hand, suggest that Cambridge may have had a problem with institutionalised racism. Incidentally, Levy never traveled to Greece, but she made repeated trips to Europe and she had a particular fondness for Italy.

toward other Jews. A letter from Dresden recounts her visit to a 'beastly' Synagogue: 'the place was crammed with evil-looking Hebrews...the German Hebrew makes me feel, as a rule, that the Anti-Semitic movement is a most just and virtuous one.'[72] Beckman sees Levy's letter as a 'classic instance' of Jewish self-hatred. Levy's reaction does seem to comply with Gilman's analysis of the perceived impact of 'the Eastern Jew' on assimilated Western Jews.[73] The letter not only demonstrates Levy's difficulties with Jewish identity but also her consciousness of the German antisemitic movement. In another letter from Lucerne, Levy describes herself as 'sad but infinitely amused' at the sight of other Jews in the resort. Interestingly, Levy chooses to associate the Jewish tourists with her sister Katie, 'yr. [your] co-religionists,' not with herself.[74] Levy implies that the visitors are readily identifiable as Jewish, which makes her feel both 'sad' and detached. It is under these circumstances that, in Dresden and Lucerne, the twenty-one year old Levy writes 'Medea.'

Levy was familiar with the work of the Austrian playwright Franz Grillparzer, as she translated his verse-drama 'Sappho' in the same year that she wrote 'Medea.'[75] The similarities between Grillparzer's representation and Levy's are not structural or technical. Rather, Levy shares Grillparzer's interest in and his emphasis of Medea's ethnic difference. As Macintosh observes, Grillparzer's trilogy set a new trend in presenting Medea's cause in a thoroughly sympathetic and humanistic light.[76] Yates also observes that, Grillparzer 'radically altered the traditional character of Medea, making her appear morally superior to the other Colchians...far from being simply a barbarian sorceress, Grillparzer's Medea is wise,' and 'strong in character.'[77] Bruce Thomson suggests that Grillparzer's intended to endow his Medea 'with a moral superiority over the unfortunate Jason.'[78] Consequently, Grillparzer can be seen to transform Medea's infanticide into an act of maternal protection and he consistently highlights Medea's ethnicity and her futile attempts at assimilation.

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[72] See the letter from Levy to her sister Katie, reprinted in Beckman as letter sixteen, p.235-6.
[73] See Beckman, p.110. Beckman's use of the phrase is borrowed from Sander Gilman's important study, *Jewish Self-Hatred* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986). See especially chapter four.
[74] See letter nineteen, dated July 18th, 1884, reprinted by Beckman, p.241-42.
[75] Levy's partial translation, 'From Grillpazer's Sappho,' was published in the *Cambridge Review* (February 1, 1882). Levy's translation of Grillparzer's 'Sappho' can be seen in the Camellia Collection.
[76] See Fiona Macintosh's introductory chapter, 'The Performer in Performance,' p.14.
[77] W.E. Yates, *Grillparzer: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p.92
[78] Bruce Thomson, *Franz Grillparzer* (Boston: Twayne, 1981), p.45.

At the time Grillparzer wrote *Medea*, Austria was ruled by the fierce figure of the Chancellor, Prince Klemens von Metternich. As a liberal, Grillparzer objected to, yet continued to live under, Metternich's oppressive and censorious regime. Consequently, as Thomson points out, 'Franz Grillparzer's works are deeply rooted both in his personal life and in the life and atmosphere of the imperial city into which he was born.'[79] Grillparzer's *Medea* is therefore an interesting precursor for Levy, not least because, as Macintosh suggests, his 'Hasidic' Medea was written against the background of the pogroms in Austria in 1817-18.[80] In comparison, Levy's drama was written against the backdrop of the mass immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe.

In Levy's drama, Medea's ethnic difference is highlighted from the outset. Having been granted asylum in Corinth, Medea, the stranger from distant lands, is surrounded by, 'this strong, fair people, marble-cold and smooth/ As modelled marble.' One immediately thinks of the impressive exhibits of ancient sculpture lining the halls of the British Museum. As I indicated earlier, the aesthetic 'purity' of the statues was linked by nineteenth century commentators with whiteness and racial 'purity' of the English. Therefore, the English often saw themselves as the natural inheritors of Greek (white) culture, despite the inconvenient fact that, originally, the sculptures were decorated with bright colours. As Bernal suggests in *Black Athena*, the construction of a Greek "heritage" that was purely Caucasian and unmixed with Egyptian or Semitic influences can be seen to reflect the racist Imperialist agenda of the nineteenth century.[81] Levy certainly gestures toward such a racist construction in her ideologically loaded description of the Corinthians.

Moreover, as a native of Colchis, a country that the Greeks believed nestled on the eastern edge of the Black Sea, Medea is frequently described in terms of 'blackness.' Medea is also 'wild' in her gestures and speech; she has 'fierce' black eyes and profuse amounts of untamed inky-black hair. Nikias' gross objectification and dehumanisation of

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[79] Thomson, p.45.
[80] Fiona Macintosh, 'The Performer in Performance,' 12-14. Hall and Macintosh also call Grillparzer's Medea 'Hasidic' in, 'Medea and Mid-Victorian Marriage Legislation,' p.424.
[81] See Martin Bernal's controversial *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (London: Free Association Press, 1987).

Medea corresponds with the many late Victorian representations in art and literature of the 'Oriental female'[82]:

> I like not your swart skins and purple hair;
> Your black, fierce eyes where the brows meet across.
> By all the gods! When yonder Colchian
> Fixes me with her strange and sudden gaze,
> Each hair upon my body stands erect!
> Zeus, 'tis a very tiger, and as mute!

Through this visual economy, the alien figure of Medea is (re)presented as a stereotypical Jewish immigrant of the late nineteenth century. Todd Endelman points out that before the 1870s, Jews did not loom large in the political or cultural imagination of the English.[83] The change occurred during the 1870s and 1880s when there was a significant increase in the numbers of Jewish immigrants entering England from Eastern Europe. It was, Endelman suggests, mass immigration from Eastern Europe that focused attention on Jews.[84] And, as many critics have illustrated, despite relatively positive Anglo-Jewish relations, it was widely felt that the unassimilated Jew posed a threat to the 'purity' of the English national character.[85] The arrival of the Eastern European Jews also had an impact on established Anglo-Jewish communities. Endelman suggests that the 'new immigrant "ghettos" were both an embarrassment and a threat, with the potential, it was believed, to undo the social and political gains made by anglicized Jews.'[86] Native leaders were critical of the immigrants for their 'foreign' customs and a number of community leaders suggested that the new immigrants go elsewhere. However, anglicized Jews also understood that 'the fates of the two communities were linked, that hostility to poor, unacculturated, foreign-born Jews could, and frequently did, become an attack on all Jews.'[87] It should be noted that the writing of 'Medea' coincides with the first major peak in immigration of Eastern Jews into England.[88]

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[82] Reina Lewis provides a gendered reading of visual productions of the Orient in *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996).
[83] See Endelman, p.150.
[84] Endelman, p.156.
[85] For more detailed discussions on the impact of Jewish immigrants on English culture in the nineteenth century see Cesarani (1990), Cheyette (1993), Feldman (1994), Ragussis (1995) and Endelman (2002).
[86] Endelman, p.171-172.
[87] Endelman, p.173.
[88] For a detailed discussion on the 'Tide of Immigration 1880-1905' see V.D. Lipman's *Social History of the Jews in England 1850-1950* (London: Watts & Co., 1954), especially chapter five.

Levy seems to have been acutely sensitive to the cultural impact of the growing number of 'foreign' Jews as her sketches of this period (1876-1881) indicate. Beckman observes that 'these drawings reveal a new, much more troubled preoccupation with "racial" difference' and that they bear a striking resemblance to the caricatured Jewish faces in Robert Knox's *The Races of Men* (1850).[89] Knox's work has become the most notorious text of the Victorian pseudo-science of ethnology. It was not, however, the only text, as Sander Gilman suggests: 'the general consensus of the ethnological literature of the late century was that the Jews were black" or, at least, "swarthy."'[90]

Medea's 'blackness' is also significant in that it can be interpreted as 'a pathological sign.'[91] In *The Jew's Body* Gilman suggests that 'for the eighteenth-and nineteenth-century scientist the "blackness" of the Jew was not only a mark of racial inferiority, but also an indicator of the diseased nature of the Jew.'[92] The pathologised Jewish body not only threatened to corrupt the racial 'purity' of the English nation, it was also perceived to be the carrier of sexually transmitted diseases, contagious infections and mental illness. In Levy's drama the 'black' character threatens the health of the Corinthian body politic; not only in terms of racial purity but also in terms of infection.

The Corinthians try to contain Medea's physical body and, for much of the play, Medea is restricted to Jason's *oikos* [house]: 'walled about as with a mighty wall, / Far from men's reach and sight, alone, alone.' But Medea refuses to be contained. At the conclusion of the play, following the bloody deaths of his mixed-race sons, Jason declares that no Corinthian should seek out Medea lest 'we pollute our hands/ With her accursèd body.'[93] Medea is also conceived as 'a festering plague/ In our fair city's midst.' The city is indeed diseased, but from Medea's perspective, the Corinthian *polis* has been contaminated by fear, hatred and injustice. Importantly, Grillparzer also uses pathological terms to describe Medea's ethnicity. For instance, Jason tells Medea that it is unlikely that she will be allowed entrance to the city as 'one shuns communion where infection

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[89] Beckman, p.112. See also Beckman's article 'Leaving "The Tribal Duckpond": Amy Levy, Jewish Self-Hatred, and Jewish Identity' in *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27:1 (1999): 185-201, for reproductions of Levy's sketches.

[90] Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.171.

[91] Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, p.207.

[92] Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, p.172.

[93] It should also be noted that a Kristevan reading of the fear of contamination of the patriarchal body politic by the flow of maternal blood is also available. See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) for a psychoanalytic reading of the contaminating effect of menstrual blood.

flares' (I).[94] Furthermore, when Medea looks to embrace Creusa, the princess recoils, to which Medea responds: 'Oh draw not back! My hand will not infect!' (I). King Creon subsequently banishes Medea from his kingdom, telling her: 'get you from my father's hallowed town/ And make the air you poisoned pure again' (II). And, in the final act, Grillparzer has the King exile Jason on the basis that he has been infected by his (sexual) contact with Medea: 'Pollution all to near, I see, is dangerous' (V). I suggest that Levy appropriates Grillparzer's racial terminology in her own version of the play, in order to reflect continuing debates concerning Jewish immigration and national identity.

Grillparzer's Jason tells Medea: 'We are no more in Colchis but in Greece. No longer now with monsters, but with men!' (I). But to the Corinthians of Levy's drama, Medea's black [Jewish] features are evidence of her immutable ethnic difference that cannot be changed, cured or transformed by the white, male-dominanted culture.[95] Ironically, Levy's Medea later comments that as a result of the hostility of the Corinthians and her husband's neglect, she *has been transformed* by the dominant culture; she is no longer a woman, 'but a monster.' To the terrified Corinthians she is exactly that, a monstrous manifestation of deviant, oriental femininity that threatens to undermine the homogeneity of the Greek social and political systems. Medea's subsequent isolation suggests the difficulty of maintaining a diasporic identity in the face of a (seemingly) hegemonic culture.

The territory beyond the Black Sea could be considered as the Ancient Greek equivalent of the geographical 'Dark Continent' of European Imaginary. By locating Medea's origins at the far and shadowy boundary of the Greek world, Medea is perceived as a representative of a mystical and terrifying wilderness, outside of patriarchal Greek culture and 'civilisation.' The conventional cultural paradigm of white/good, black/bad is thoroughly inverted in Medea's description of her new home and local community. To begin with, Corinth is depicted as an idealised *polis,* inhabited by 'strong, fair people, marble-cold and smooth/ As modelled marble.' One is, of course, immediately reminded of Matthew Arnold's famous formulation of the 'sweetness and light' of Hellenic

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[94] All subsequent quotations of Grillparzer's *Medea* will be taken from Arthur Burkhard's translation of *Das Goldene Vließ* [1821], 3rd ed. (Yarmouth Port, Matt: Register Press, 1942, 1956).

[95] Galchinsky explores representations of scientific racism and the Jewish community in his article '"Permanently Blacked" Julia Frankau's Jewish Race,' in *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27:1 (1999): 171-193.

culture.[96] But this description is not intended to be complimentary as the gleaming white and 'marble-cold' citizens, like the statues they represent, are bereft of any real feelings of compassion and sympathy for the alienated Medea: 'When all around the air is charged and chill, / And all the place is drear and dark with hate? / Alas, alas, this people loves me not!' Earlier than Arnold, Grillparzer speaks of Greece as a land of light, in contrast to the darkness of Colchis (I). His Medea is also represented as a barbarian within the gates.

Despite her isolation Medea has managed to overcome one of the key difficulties of assimilation, the ability to speak the language of the dominant culture. One of the defining characteristics of the ancient Greeks was their sophisticated use of language (as opposed to the non-Greek speaking barbarians) and Medea is acutely aware of the need to express herself in this culture, 'I, an alien here/ That well can speak the language of their lips/ The language of their souls may never learn'. This is a crucial statement by the immigrant Medea and can be seen to influence much of the later action. Her inability or unwillingness to adopt 'the language of their souls' indicates Medea's different system of ethics and may also signify her religious difference. Whilst Medea's admission that she has managed to master the language of the Corinthian *polis,* the public language of those that define her as Other, does not alter her 'alien' status whatsoever. From her monologue we know that this particular subaltern woman is well versed in the language of the white ruling class, but the question is, *is she heard* by the society that dominates her? Medea cries out: 'Hear me, friends! / Friends, I am very hungry, give me love! / 'Tis all I ask! Is it so hard to give?' Apparently it is, since Medea's passionate pleas to the surrounding community go unanswered. Here, Levy indicates the impossibility of the voice of the female Other ever being truly recognised in an androcentric culture. This point is vital to Medea's subsequent action.

Medea is, therefore, disillusioned and disowned long before she hears the announcement of Jason's impending marriage to Glaukê, the King of Corinth's daughter. Jason is not only unfaithful, he also commands Medea to leave the city by nightfall, taking their two sons with her. Arrogant, selfish and ambitious to the last, Jason suggests

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[96] In his battle against the barbarians and philistines of English culture, Arnold can be seen to fall back on racial stereotypes in an attempt to reinforce the differences between the 'Oriental and polygamous nation like the Hebrews' and the English. Indeed, Michael Ragussis concludes that, 'in the end, Arnold uses the authority of ethnology to frame his argument that in England the corrective influence of Hellenism (against Hebraism) is needed.' See Michael Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion: "The Jewish Question" and English National Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p.224.

that rejection and exile, 'is but a blessing, wrapped and cloaked about/ In harsh disguisements.' Medea is simply incensed by the revelation of Jason's betrayal. Not only does he present his infidelity in the most 'reasonable' of rhetorical terms, Jason intends to become leader of the state that has denied Medea personal agency, liberty and respect. His is a double betrayal. Medea reminds Jason that she has sacrificed much to be his wife that she 'was not born to serfdom.' Indeed, Medea's magical talents, royal blood and divine ancestry mark her out as an exceptional wife. And, as Gill observes, 'it is precisely the special circumstances of Medea's marriage (with the exceptional commitment and status on her side) that give her a special claim to underline the validity of marriage.'[97]

Medea reminds Jason that she has been, perhaps against her nature, a paragon of wifely virtue in Corinth. Long before the couple landed in Greece, Medea was selflessly loyal and loving toward Jason:

> Love, you have not forgot
> the long years passed in this Corinthian home?
> The great love I have borne you through the years?
> Nor that fair time when, in your mighty craft,
> You came, a stranger, to the Colchian shore?
> O strong you were; but not of such a strength
> To have escaped the doom of horrid death,
> Had not I, counting neither loss nor gain,
> Shown you the way to triumph and renown.

We can empathise with the rebuked Medea, as it is clear from this statement that Jason's legendary mission to win the Golden Fleece would not have been successful without her magical intervention. This realisation clearly disturbs Jason who denounces Medea as 'a dark-thoughted sorceress.' Instantly, her status as helper-maiden and loyal mistress has been reduced to that of a manipulative witch who apparently entangled Jason in her 'magic web.' However, Jason's angry response does not have the desired effect of offending the Colchian princess, as it only highlights Medea's power and Jason's lack. Her (expressly female) knowledge of and expertise in the supernatural demonstrates intelligence beyond male mastery. Jason's office as a warrior and a citizen of a Greek city-state should have alerted him to the dangers of using foreign assistance that had not been fully appropriated and subordinated before its use. But it is now astoundingly clear

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[97] See Gill,'s, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p.161.

to Jason that the wicked woman always lurked within the housewife and helper-maiden and that this foreigner can never be fully assimilated into Greek culture.

However, Jason's personal anxieties also run much deeper and concern his emasculation at the hands of this wild woman. It was supposed that in their behaviour the Greeks were rational, brave, honest, masculine, sexually restrained and in control of their women. Barbarians on the other hand were seen as emotional, cowardly, deceptive, effeminate and ruled by women. So, Jason's action in asking for Medea's help to retrieve the Golden Fleece has inverted the power dynamic between them. As it turns out, his greatest act of valour and daring, of manly intent and Greek *virtus*, cannot be credited to him at all. And it is Jason's realisation of his own weaknesses, in particular his reliance upon women, and his inability to control femininity (including his own 'feminine' nature), that so alarms him. Interestingly then, as Jason and Medea continue to argue, the spying Nikias directs his attention toward Jason who seems to metamorphose under his gaze:

> how firm his lithe, straight limbs;
> How high his gold-curled head, crisped like a girl's.
> And yet for all his curled locks and smooth tones
> Jason is very strong. I never knew
> A man of such a strange and subtle strength.

Nikias, who is repelled by Medea's exoticism, is bewitched by Jason's pale, girlish looks and 'subtle strength'. As Medea's 'masculine' authority grows, Jason seems to exchange places with her, so that the Occidental hero is now the object of desire under the male gaze. The boundaries that define sexual and gender roles are rapidly diminishing and the Greek world that relies on order and strictly observed division is collapsing into Arnoldian anarchy.

The famously androcentric and homosocial culture of ancient Greece is no place for the increasingly powerful Medea and soon she will be forced to leave. She is furious that her acts of feminine capitulation in the *oikos* have passed unnoticed and unrewarded by her spouse. Her rage is partly fuelled by the knowledge that she, along with the other women in Corinth, has been kept far away from the exclusively male coterie of the *polis*. She has lived: 'sick and sore with pain; / Hungry for love and music of men's praise.' As Medea's rage grows, a quick-fire series of verbs indicates that Medea is becoming the most active agent in this scene. She tells Jason how she has 'wrestled in the darkness'

and 'fought with sweet desires and hopes' in order to be with her inconstant lover. Medea realises that her powers and desires, her uncontrollable instinctual, sexual self cannot be ruled or contained. If, in the past, Medea has 'poured the sap' of her sexual energies before 'a thankless godhead,' she will do it no more.

In this fictional setting Levy can allow her heroine to take definitive action, she will destroy the status quo. Medea tells the self-deluding patriarch:

> You never knew Medea. You forget,
> Because so long she bends the knee to you,
> She was not born to serfdom.
> I have knelt
> Too long before you. I have stood too long
> Suppliant before this people.

Medea instructs Jason to 'behold me now, *your* work, a thing of fear' and she resolves to 'move the generations yet unborn' in revenge for Jason's betrayal. As she moves back within the boundaries of the family home, Medea proclaims that there 'shall be a horror and a horror in the land.' Unlike Euripides's text, there has been no mention of revenge before this point, so we do not feel that Medea is 'naturally' vengeful. Conversely, we feel that she has been provoked and that Jason must suffer the consequences of his appalling actions. According to tradition, Medea will exact a terrible revenge by killing her children and Jason's bride-to-be. But how does Levy deal with the ethical difficulties of identifying with a tragic protagonist who is at once heroic, sympathetic and morally repugnant?

Reading Euripides, Gill suggests that Medea's act of infanticide should be interpreted as 'an exemplary gesture.' For Gill, 'this gesture despite its horrific character, expresses an ethical stance.'[98] The ethical standard of ancient Greek social and political life was, in essence, to be good to your friends and do harm to your enemies.[99] Levy's Medea, shunned by the Corinthians for her ethnicity and her sex and betrayed by her husband for his political ambitions, sees herself as harmed by the people who should be

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[98] Gill, p.154.
[99] See Easterling, 'The Infanticide in Euripides' *Medea,*' *Yale Classical Studies* XXV (1977), 177-191 (185).

her friends.[100] Jason's unilateral decision to sever their marriage, a union upon which Medea has been totally dependent, can be seen as a violation of the ethics which govern interpersonal relationships. Without her marriage to Jason, Medea and her children will be destitute. Her desperate predicament is one with which many Victorian women could have identified. Indeed, Medea's responses to Jason's betrayal may be seen as an overt critique by Levy on the Victorian institution of marriage.

Levy's Medea is in fact less conflicted about her revenge than Euripides' protagonist. Following an angry exchange with Jason, Levy's Medea determines to take decisive action and we do not see her hesitate. Medea's revenge cannot be seen as acts of maternal protection. Indeed, Medea tells us she feels 'strong' and 'lifted up into an awful realm/ Where is nor love, nor pity, nor remorse.' As Knox observes, Medea's murderous rage should be considered alongside the actions of other famous Greek 'heroes,' such as Ajax and Achilles.[101] As Knox observes:

> Her [Medea's] language and action, as well as the familiar frame in which they operate, mark her as a heroic character, one of those great individuals whose intractable firmness of purpose, whose defiance of threats and advice, whose refusal to betray their ideal vision of their own nature, were the central preoccupation of Sophoclean tragedy.[102]

From this point in Levy's drama Medea can be seen to comply with the Greek masculine heroic ethic.

In the second act, the dubious interlocutor Nikias (unreliably) records Medea's crimes.[103] This clever narrative technique underlines the enforced silence of the foreign woman and Medea's loss of subjectivity. Indeed, whilst the first scene underlines Medea's intelligence and rhetorical skill, the second scene is dialogic, indicating her new status as a cultural construction. The racist and sexist figure of Nikias tells us that Glaûke was poisoned by garments which Medea's sons carried to the Royal Palace. As messengers of death, no one, not even Medea's own sons are innocent bystanders in this

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[100] As both Gill and McDermott and others have pointed out, the Corinthians violate their sacred obligations of *trophē* in their treatment of Medea. Medea then violates her own duties of *trophē* when she kills her children.

[101] B.W.M. Knox, 'The Medea of Euripides,' p.197.

[102] Knox, 'The Medea of Euripides,' p.197.

[103] As with 'Xantippe,' we should question the motivation and veracity of the male speaker here. Indeed, following his report Nikias poses the question, 'Spake I not true?'

awful tragedy. Nikias then reports that the boys were stabbed to death by Medea on their return from the Palace. By using and abusing her position as mother, Medea, the diametric opposite of the Victorian trope of nurturing motherhood, has struck at the heart of the patriarchal family. Clearly, Medea cannot be an avenging female hero in a man's world and a conventional mother. By murdering Jason's children and his future wife, Medea not only exposes the potential for violence within the family, but also inflicts maximum damage on the state. The Royal family and the leader-in-waiting have been hit hard. As she said she would, Medea has moved 'the generations yet unborn.'

By murdering Glaûke and the children, Medea takes away those people who define Jason as a patriarch. Consequently, the authority of the patriarchal state is immediately diminished. Moreover, Medea does not just kill her own children and wipe out Jason's family line; she also kills the king, and the daughter who would have borne him heirs. Medea has inflicted collateral damage on the 'fair' state that denied her personal agency, liberty and respect. Jason's political adultery and Medea's subsequent action also raises the issue of the relationship between the family and the state. To whom does Jason owe his allegiance? Is it to Medea and his sons (whom he also intends to banish), or to King Creon and the state, symbolised by the Royal household? Medea, somewhat ironically, puts her family first. She sublimates all her desires and impulses for the good of her family. When that ideal is betrayed and undermined, she can no longer keep her impulses in check.

Intentionally or not, Levy certainly taps into widespread fears about the increasing prevalence of infanticide in Victorian society.[104] Victorian England, just like ancient Greece, depended on mothers as the bearers of future citizens and Empire builders. But in the late 1850s through to the 1870s reports of infanticide and child murder reached disturbingly high levels. The statistics are unclear and unreliable, but Lionel Rose estimates that the number of inquest verdicts of murder on infants was around 200 per year in the 1860s.[105] The figures for stillbirths, illness and accidental death of infants were much higher and it wasn't always possible to determine the cause of death. In 1872 the government passed the Infant Life Protection Act in response to the worrying

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[104] See Lillian Corti's book *The Myth of Medea and the Murder of Children* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998) and Macintosh's essay 'Medea Transposed,' 75-99.
[105] Lionel Rose, *Massacre of the Innocents: Infanticide in Great Britain 1800-1939* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), p.175.

statistics concerning the infant mortality rate and child murder. But as Josephine McDonagh observes, nineteenth century child-murder cases are sites of extraordinary cultural contests in terms of race, class and gender. McDonagh suggests that 'the very geography and temporality of the modern British nation were at stake; its networks of communication, its hygiene, its moral stature, all were threatened by persistence and primordial stagnancy of child murder.'[106] The frequency of child murder cases seemed to threaten the very basis of civilized society.

The citizens of Levy's Corinth are unwilling to accept that Medea's actions could be carried out by any civilized Greek woman. Indeed, Nikias is quick to denounce Medea as an 'alien.' In some ways, Levy's Medea can therefore be seen to be complicit with the very categories of foreign women that she seeks to resist, as it is the contaminated foreigner who commits murder. However, for Levy, Medea's actions testify to the alienating and destructive effects of institutionalised sexism and racism. In Levy's drama Medea does not confess to having committed any crime. She does not speak of her guilt, Nikias does. If she is guilty, as we presume she is, Medea does not enjoy her retribution; 'vanquished utterly,' she is not a female criminal who revels in the art of murderous revenge.

Like Euripides and Grillparzer, Levy refuses to punish Medea directly. But there is no magic chariot to rescue Medea in Levy's humanistic tragedy. In Grillparzer's drama, Medea tells a devastated Jason that the dark night of their suffering is not over: 'What is earthly happiness? A shadow!— What is earthly fame? A dream! You poor creature, who dreamt of shadows! The dream is over but the night is not!'(V). Medea's bleak moralizing offers no sense of hope for the future. Following Grillparzer's lead, Levy also achieves a truly pessimistic ending. The outcast figure who always felt 'out of place' is condemned to fulfil her role in exile, as the Wandering Jew of the ancient world: 'Thus I go forth/ Into the deep, dense heart of the night--alone.' In contrast to Euripides, who refuses to provide a clear explanation for Medea's behaviour, Levy implicates the sexist, racist and morally bankrupt Corinthians in her crimes. In this case, Medea's assimilation or conversion fails because the dominant society cannot and will not accept the 'oriental' female as a fully-fledged member of the state. Levy ensures that as a result of denying this woman her civil and human rights, anarchy reigns over Hellenic society.

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[106] McDonagh, *Child Murder*, p.124.

Levy's interest in the persecution of the female Other began when she was only fifteen, when she wrote 'Run to Death'; the disturbing tale of a gypsy and her young child, hunted like wild game by barbaric aristocrats. But it was Medea who was the ideal vehicle through which Levy could explore her identification with the outcast and persecuted. What Amy Levy (re)discovered in *Medea* was a resource of resistance and a narrative of displacement through which she could examine the gender and racial politics of the late Victorian period and her own status as a culturally marginalised Other. As Emily McDermott observes, 'Euripides' plays invert, subvert and pervert traditional assertions of order; they challenge their audience's most basic tenets and assumptions about the moral, social, and civic fabric of mankind.'[107] Levy's late Victorian drama also compels Levy's audience to re-examine their own values in light of the social and moral circumstances of Medea's exemplary actions. The warning is clear; ignore, deny and abuse women and immigrants, at your peril.

The reviews of *A Minor Poet* praised and derided the volume in turn. But perhaps the most revealing review of the collection appeared in the *Oxford Magazine,* which condescendingly suggests that 'the author probably has read little Greek' and 'at all events she thoroughly missed the Greek spirit and tone.' According to the *Oxford* reviewer:

> To make of Xantippe, the wife of Socrates, a modern woman with yearnings, who talks metaphysics, is a mere trick, none the less so that Mr. Browning has sometimes had recourse to a similar method. The dramatic fragment entitled Medea is said to be 'after Euripides'. In reality it is perfectly remote from the Greek spirit of the Greek drama; people ought to realise that Euripides was a Greek first; and a modern if at all, only afterwards.[108]

If James Thomson lacked the classical trick, Levy seems to have had classical trickery in abundance. Levy's unfaithful rendering of Euripides' drama demonstrates the inherent problems for women writers who employ the ancient past as a vehicle for contemporary observation and commentary. As Ruth Hoberman suggests, women writers often 'walk a narrow line between the pressures of plausibility—which require that they reinforce their readers' assumptions about the past—and subversion.' [109] The trick is to combine classical erudition with subversive intent, as often the only way to de-mythologise is to re-

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[107] McDermott, *Euripides' Medea*, p.2.
[108] Review of *A Minor Poet and Other Verse*, *Oxford Magazine* 17 (October 15, 1884).

mythologise. Levy's Hellenic poems can therefore be read not only as a cautionary tales concerning the disavowed and disenfranchised but also as forward-looking contributions in revisionist mythmaking.

Following her early forays into Hellenism, Levy became increasingly preoccupied with Hebraic subjects and the urban world of late-Victorian London. The Greeks had served their purpose. Having attacked the inequities of the British social and educational systems using classical female figures, Levy now turned her attention to the Anglo-Jewish community. Embracing her marginal position to English literature and society, Levy transformed herself from 'minor poet' to social critic in a series of articles for the *Jewish Chronicle*.[110] Levy's literary success already marked her out as a significant figure in the Anglo-Jewish community. But when Levy published her novel *Rueben Sachs* (1888), the poet who always sang in a minor key was marginalised by the very community that she had come to identify with.

Reuben Sachs details the rise and death of the hero of the title, but the novel really belongs to Reuben's cousin, Judith Quixano. Judith falls in love with Reuben only to have her hopes dashed when he marries a wealthier woman, purely for social advancement. As Beckman notes, Levy offers a 'range of perspectives on Jews and Jewish life in *Reuben Sachs*.'[111] However, many critics in the Jewish community reacted angrily to Levy's novel. A reviewer in the *Jewish World* accused Levy of 'delighting in the task of persuading the general public that her own kith and kin are the most hideous types of vulgarity...she is proud of being able to offer her testimony in support of the anti-Semitic theories of the clannishness of her people and the tribalism of their religion.'[112] The unsophisticated literary critic of *Jewish World* could not have been more wrong.

Levy's experience of marginalisation was certainly reflected in her representations of Xantippe and Medea. Yet, the anger and frustration expressed by both Xantippe and Medea is not simply personal to Levy. In representing repressed, yet rebellious women from antiquity, Levy provided other women with powerful models

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[109] Hoberman, *Gendering the Classics*, p.4.
[110] Interestingly, in the article 'Jewish Humour,' Levy highlights her identification with Judaism over and above a wider European inheritance: 'Not for all Aristophanes can we yield up our national free-masonry of wit; our family joke, our Jewish Humour,' in New, pp.521-524 (p.524). Originally published in the *Jewish Chronicle* August 20th (1886), p.9-10.
[111] Beckman, p.160.

with whom they could identify. Challenging and provocative, tragic and triumphant, Levy's Greek women are the heroines of her time.

[112] 'The Deterioration of the Jewess' in *Jewish World*, February 22nd (1889). Reprinted in Beckman , p.180.

Chapter Two

Old Greek Wine in New Bottles: Michael Field's Dionysiac Poetics

In 1884 a new talent emerged in to the fiercely competitive literary marketplace under the auspices of the solid and respectable name of 'Michael Field.' Mr. Field was the author of a highly regarded new play, *Callirhoë,* which was published together with a short drama, *Fair Rosamund,* in a six-shilling volume in Bristol and London. In fact, this sensational play, celebrating Bacchic pleasures and the religion of Dionysus, was Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper's first publication under their joint male pseudonym. *Callirhoë* had been intended to signal to the world the 'arrival' of startling new talent on the London literary scene. As if on cue, a loud chorus of reviewers hailed *Callirhoë* a success, leading the *Spectator* to celebrate the 'ring of a new voice, which is likely to be heard far and wide among the English-speaking peoples.'[1] Unbeknownst to the critics, Dionysus was the ideal figure for 'Michael Field's' first literary performance. Dionysus, the paradoxical Greek god of drama, of the tragic mask, of gender confusion and liminal spaces, perfectly echoed Bradley and Cooper's own performance as 'Michael Field.' The pseudonym not only encapsulated the fact of their dual authorship, but the complex intimate relationship between Bradley and Cooper. The two women were not simply literary collaborators, but aunt and niece, lovers and lifelong companions. Fearful of a sexist critical backlash, the authors wisely decided to maintain the power of their own dramatic mask by concealing their true identities from the public and the critics. Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper thereby launched the career of 'Michael Field' by obscuring their identities and by adopting a new gender perspective from which to write. In doing so, they simultaneously transformed themselves into the literary daughters of Dionysus.

As 'Michael Field,' Bradley and Cooper forged one of the most fascinating and productive literary collaborations of the nineteenth century. Together, they produced

eight volumes of poetry, twenty-seven plays and thirty-six foolscap volumes of their joint journal. Their career lasted for over thirty years and they enjoyed the company and respect of some of the most famous artists and writers of the late nineteenth century. Indeed, their close association with figures such as Algernon Charles Swinburne, Oscar Wilde, John Gray and George Moore highlights 'Michael Field's' connections with late Victorian movements such as Aestheticism and Decadence.[2] In a number of respects, Michael Field's use of Hellenism also reflects their close association with their male contemporaries. This chapter will, however, examine in some detail Michael Field's distinctive, female-centered approach to the late Victorian discourse of Hellenism.

Bradley and Cooper's knowledge of Hellenism was informed and conscientious. As unmarried middle-class women with a private income, Bradley and Cooper's independence allowed them the time and space to acquire education and cultural knowledge. This self-acculturation included the prolonged study of art, philosophy, ancient history, Greek and Latin. Bradley and Cooper were also intensely fanatical about drama and theatre. In keeping with my theme of Dionysus, I suggest that the complex sign of 'Michael Field' should be seen as a dramatic mask. The obscurity of the mask enabled Bradley and Cooper to challenge and explore issues of sex, gender, genre and authorial identity. Moreover, Bradley and Cooper's pseudonymous identity allowed them to explore the issue of violence, enacted by and against women, as can be seen in the transgressive Hellenic texts, *Bellerophôn*, *Callirhoë* and *Long Ago*. Michael Field's Greek communities are full of young women, willing and eager to explore the potential of pagan religion and the liberatory aspects of Greek *eros*. Rather than Arnoldian 'sweetness and light,' Michael Field's Hellenism, like the god Dionysus, is contradictory and disturbing. Bacchus looms large in much of Michael Field's life and work. I will therefore explore Bradley and Cooper's relationship to the classics in some detail.

In 1892, Edith completed a prose play entitled *Old Wine in New Bottles*. The play, which was never published, serves as a useful metaphor for Michael Field's extensive appropriation of ancient Greek literature and myth. Their plays, poems and journal entries are saturated with classical allusions, ancient myths and Hellenic figures. For much of

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[1] Anonymous review of *Callirhoë*, *The Spectator* (May 24, 1884). Review is also included in Mary Sturgeon's *Michael Field* (London: G.G. Harrap, 1922), p. 27.

[2] In 'Flesh and Roses: Michael Field's Metaphors of Pleasure and Desire,' *Women's Writing* 3:1 (1996b), 47-62, Chris White explores the 'quasi-decadent eroticism' of Michael Field's lyrics.

their early career, Michael Field celebrated and venerated the Greek gods with Bacchic enthusiasm. That is not to say that Michael Field's Hellenism was merely a passing phase. Hellenic subjects also feature heavily in much of their later work, including the volumes *Sight and Song*, *Underneath the Bough, Wild Honey* and *Noontide Branches*. Their identification with ancient Greece was not only professional, but personal. Indeed, their association with Hellenism was so extensive that Robert Browning, a personal friend and mentor, hailed Bradley and Cooper as 'my two dear Greek women.'[3] Katharine and Edith revelled in the ancient past, to the extent that they had altars to Dionysus built in the garden and the study of their home in Surrey. Yet, their obsession with the ancient past was, of course, conspicuously 'modern.' Like many of their male contemporaries, Katharine and Edith drew upon the rich resources of Hellenism in order to explore contemporary issues. One is in fact struck by the very interdisciplinary and inter-textual nature of Michael Field's Hellenism. But which particular Greece, which nineteenth century vision of Greece, was theirs?

In her groundbreaking chapter on Michael Field, Angela Leighton suggests that 'the ideal of "pleasure" for its own sake, sexual and pagan, is the impulse behind much of Michael Field's best work.'[4] For Leighton, Michael Field offers a 'bleak yet bracing paganism,' which is 'exhilaratingly sensual and pleasure-loving'[5]:

> It is as if Michael Field begins where Barrett Browning ended, with the careless Pans of laughing creativity. To "laugh and dream on Lethe's shore" sums up a pagan *jouissance*, even in the place of death, which marks out much of Michael Field's best poetry. Casual and pleasure-loving, their music grows out of the free sensuousness of the pagan gods, invoked, from the start, as an alternative to the moral reckoning of "heaven and hell."[6]

Whilst I would agree that Michael Field's paganism *is* highly sensual and pleasure-loving, it is also darker, more violent and more philosophically complex than Leighton suggests. Michael Field frequently demonstrates that the passions inspired by the pagan gods can be destructive as well as liberating. The myths and literature of the pagan

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[3] Robert Browning's affectionate term for Bradley and Cooper is quoted in *Works and Days: from the Journals of Michael Field,* ed. T & D.C. Sturge Moore (London: J. Murray, 1933), p.20.
[4] See Angela Leighton's chapter on 'Michael Field' in *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (London & Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), p.214.
[5] Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, p.241.
[6] Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, p.209.

Greeks did not just provide Bradley and Cooper with a liberal language of erotic liberation. Hellenism presented Michael Field with a philosophical and spiritual resource, through which they could explore such subjects as religion, power, identity, sexuality and gender. Michael Field's pagan poetics certainly celebrate pleasure, but by repeatedly employing figures such as Eros and Dionysus in their work, Bradley and Cooper demonstrate that such pleasure, especially for women, often comes at a cost.

After years of intellectual inquiry, Bradley and Cooper decided that their paganism would have a distinctly Dionysian flavour. The two women declared themselves bacchants, devotees of Dionysus, and adopted the loaded symbolism and mysticism of the Greek god in their lives and in their work. In the Hellenic volumes *Bellerophôn*, *Callirhoë* and *Long Ago*, the Dionysiac rites of female passion and pleasure rule. Aside from the intoxicating allure of female rites of pleasure, the religion of Dionysus offered Bradley and Cooper a refreshing, if ancient, intellectual and philosophical framework.

On a psychological and emotional level Dionysus signifies the free flow of the emotional life, untouched by the restrictions of family, society, or conventional morality. On a cultural level, Dionysus confuses distinctions between city and wild, mortal and immortal, man and beast, male and female, Greek and barbarian, heavens and earth. Dionysus is, therefore, a complex, paradoxical and provocative god, who opens up a world of new experiences, for those brave enough to embrace him. His religion is not purely hedonistic however; it is full of risks and tensions, as Charles Segal observes:

> The pleasure of Dionysiac song, like the pleasure of Dionysiac wine and ecstasy, is full of contradictions, surrounded by dangers. It offers no simple validation, through the microcosm of art, of the established harmony, moral as well as musical, of Olympian Zeus. Rather, it opens into the unknown, the boundless, the wild realms beyond the ordered framework of the city-state, the places where the individual, surrendering too much to that joy, may lose himself entirely.[7]

The cult of Dionysus celebrates the irrational side of human nature. He also embodies reversibility, 'in a spirit that may veer abruptly from play and wonder to unrestrained savagery.'[8] The contradictory truth of Dionysus, expressed most obviously in Euripides'

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[7] Charles Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1982] 1997), p.9.
[8] Charles Segal, p.4.

Bacchae, is that his capacity for destruction is the necessary and inevitable partner of his creative energies and life-fostering gifts. The dark side of Dionysiac pleasure is, therefore, that it can cause pain and suffering, as well as, or even as a part of ecstasy. This paradoxical principle is clearly expressed in Michael Field's early works, *Bellerophôn, Callirhoë* and *Long Ago*. The texts, which venerate pleasure and the power of passionate love, are suffused with instances of sexual violence. In this chapter I will analyze Michael Field's Dionysiac poetics, in order to demonstrate that their vision of ancient Greece is not utopian, but complex, dark and often violent.

Bradley and Cooper embraced the paradoxes of Dionysus; in their writing and in their lives together. In fact one of the most interesting aspects of Bradley and Cooper's relationship is that it is frequently discussed, by themselves and others, in terms of Maenadism. To celebrate the beginning of a new year, for instance, Edith wrote to Katharine in their journal: 'My Love—O my delight—May joy dance by us, our Bacchanal, and we drive the tigers, with the divine Bacchus of the Olympian throne above us—Eleutherios![9] Logan Pearsall Smith, in his somewhat condescending account of Bradley and Cooper recalled that the two quietly attired ladies would seem to undergo the most extraordinary transformations, into princesses, tragic Muses, priestesses of Apollo and Bacchic Maenads.[10]

Years later, Edith described her intense relationship with Bernhard Berenson in terms of Maenadic worship: 'he would like me to be his Maenad; he has no intention of serving me—but he knows that we wake in each other finer powers of impression…if only he were less Dyonsiac [sic], I should love him less—forget him—.'[11] In another note Berenson is transformed into the Dionysiac fantasy figure of Coresus from *Callirhoë*: 'I suppose he is the Dream—the Stranger from Phrygia, the Deliverer—whom I must always follow with my thyrsus. It is an awful thing for a poet's dream to attach itself to a poor, small mortal.'[12] But Berenson was not the only source of Dionysiac passion in Edith's life. At a lunch hosted by Mary Costello, Edith describes looking across the table at Katharine: 'My Love looked Dionysic [sic] in red-wine-coloured

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[9] Quotations from passages in the unpublished journal of Michael Field at the British Library ('Works and Days,' Journals 1868-1914.' Add. Ms. 46776-46804) will be cited by manuscript number and date. Diary entry dated 31st December 1895, Add Ms. 46.784, f 54-56.

[10] Logan Pearsall Smith, 'Michael Field' in *Reperusals and Recollections* (New York: Books for Libraries, [1937] 1968), pp.91-2.

[11] July 16th, 1894, Add. Ms 46.785, f 93.

velvet under her radiant face.' Irrespective of gender, Edith's passions were truly Dionysian.

That is not to say that Michael Field's Maenadism constitutes a wholesale rejection of Christian values. In a letter to Havelock Ellis, Katharine revealed the mutability of her belief system: 'I am Christian, pagan, pantheist, and other things the name of which I do not know.'[13] Until her suitably dramatic conversion to Catholicism, Edith also shared Katharine's spiritual multiplicity. The following oft-quoted diary entry recalls Edith's extraordinary spell in a fever hospital in Dresden:

> Delirium is glorious, like being inspired continuously…forms of art and poetry swim round and into me…Vast Bacchanals rush by, Rubenesque, violent—(Here Tannhäuser feeds the phantasy) I fall into an attitude of sleep like Antinous on the ground. I am Greek, Roman, Barbarian, Catholic, and this multiform life sweeps me toward unconsciousness—only the shine through the blinds tortures me so that I cannot lose myself.[14]

Hilary Fraser suggests that Edith's 'multiform life' is 'an apt metaphor for the trans sectarian capaciousness of Michael Field's poetry.'[15]

As Fraser notes, the conjunction of pagan and Christian subjects and symbols in the early work of Michael Field, prepares the way 'for the aestheticism and Bacchanalian eroticism of the later Christian poetry.'[16] Indeed, Bradley and Cooper go so far as to combine Christ and Bacchus in the fascinating poem 'Dionysus Zagreus.' Published as part of the posthumous volume *Dedicated,* this poem represents the unification of Christian, pagan and pantheist values, in the protean figure of Dionysus. The poem depicts a Christ-like Dionysus, who is chased into the wilderness by savage hoard of unbelievers. The cast-out 'son of a god, in the form of a man' is forced to endure great pain and suffering, before he is redeemed:

…now I raise my limbs,
Reveals himself august

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[12] Entry dated 10th February 1896, Add Ms. 46.785, f.19-20.
[13] Letter to Havelock Ellis quoted by Sturgeon, p.47.
[14] Quotation in *Works and Days,* p.54.
[15] See Fraser's highly suggestive article, 'The Religious Poetry of Michael Field' in *Athena's Shuttle: Myth, Religion and Ideology from Romanticism to Modernism,* eds. Marucci & Sdegno (Bologna: Cisalpino, 2000b), p.140.
[16] Fraser, 'The Religious Poetry of Michael Field,' p.135.

God's messenger, my father's twin-throned joy.
I rise, I bend the pale firs to my grasp,
I break the whitened whorls, the honied cones;
I of such sorrows, greater than a man's,
I, the rejected, hunted, mad, unwelcome,
I weave these tragic bunches in a wreath,
Fit crown for ever, of my misery

In Nature Dionysus is re-born and his wild environs become his kingdom. His crown of fir (and thorns?) is not just a Christian symbol of suffering and divinity. Dionysus's garland also represents his symbiosis with Nature and his pagan roots. In this context, the suitably complex character of Dionysus encapsulates and reflects the heterogeneity of Edith and Katharine's belief system.[17]

Edith commented that the myths of ancient Greece are 'imperishable symbols. They have summed up Nature & Thought & Man as a splendid creature…in forms and in tales of imperishable perfection.'[18] Another vital aspect of Michael Field's 'paganism' is their totemic veneration for Mother Nature. In the garden of their Surrey home, the deliciously named 'Paragon,' Edith and Katharine would utter all-embracing pagan prayers, such as, 'I salute the Earth & the home of the gods above.'[19] This pantheistic worship of Mother Earth alludes to ancient, pre-Olympian fertility rites. Indeed, Michael Field wrote numerous poems celebrating the ancient goddesses Demeter, Persephone, Gaia and Cybele. Michael Field's allusions to the pre-Olympian female fertility cults, which dominated early Greek religious life, not only recall the theories of J.J. Bachofen, but also anticipate the work of Jane Ellen Harrison and the Cambridge Ritualists in the 1890s. However, Michael Field's particular brand of pantheism can be as cruel as it is celebratory, as Leighton observes:

> The law of life, like "the law of pleasure," is not separate from hunger, destruction or suffering, and indeed, in the best of Michael Field, the pantheism is neither rosy-coloured nor God-scaped. Instead, it is harsh and exact. Even if such poetry does not always speak overtly for the cause of woman, it always speaks, "secretly," in a woman's voice which, like Syrinx's, penetrates by its different "key."[20]

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[17] Later, however, Edith admitted to her Confessor, the Reverend McNab, that, 'it is rather difficult to make any terms between Zeus and Christ.' See Add. Ms., 46798.
[18] See Edith's comment in their diary, Add. Ms., 46798.
[19] Quoted by Emma Donaghue in *We Are Michael Field* (Bath; Absolute Press, 1998), p.46.
[20] Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, p.242. Interestingly, Edith and Katharine began a masque on the figures of Pan and Syrinx entitled, *Silence and Music*. The masque was never published in full.

Michael Field's Hellenism is fundamentally grounded in female sexuality and fertility rites, both Pre-Olympian and Dionysiac. If, as Leighton suggests, Michael Field 'does not always speak overtly for the cause of woman,' Bradley and Cooper's Dionysiac poetics can be seen to exploit the ancient sources in order to reveal dynamics of power in relation to sexuality and gender. Furthermore, Bradley and Cooper suggest that Dionysiac enthusiasm and ecstasy can be philosophically productive and socially progressive. Indeed, Bradley and Cooper can be seen to explore the transgressive potential of Hellenism; (re)presenting it as a dynamic and inclusive discourse which, unlike the Hellenism of their male contemporaries, directly incorporates female experience.

Michael Field's Erotic Poetics

In an obituary for her former tutor in Greek, Virginia Woolf described the full force of Janet Case's teaching technique: 'somehow the masterpieces of Greek drama were stormed, without grammar, without accents, but somehow, under her compulsion, so sane and yet so stimulating, out they shone, if inaccessible still supremely desirable.'[21] As Prins suggests, 'rather than lamenting the difficulty of educating women to write and pronounce Greek properly, Woolf here turns the Victorian denigration of 'Lady's Greek, without the accents' into a revelation of Greek as a language of and for desire.'[22] Prins also cites Jane Ellen Harrison's recollection of her first encounter with Greek. Harrison describes the moment when 'my fate fell upon me, when the sudden sense came over me, the hot-cold shiver of delight, the sense of a language more sensitive than my own to shades of meaning.'[23] Again, Prins suggests that the study of Greek was for Harrison not only an aesthetic experience but also an erotically charged experience.[24] Jennifer Wallace refers to the case of Mary Shelley who, unlike her brothers who went to Charterhouse,

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[21] Virginia Woolf, quoted in H.M. Alley's article, 'A Rediscovered Eulogy: Virginia Woolf, "Miss Janet Case: Classical Scholar and Teacher"' in *Twentieth-Century Literature* 28 (1982): 290-301 (299).
[22] Yopie Prins, 'OTOTOTOI: Virginia Woolf and the Naked Cry of Cassandra' in *Agamemnon in Performance*, eds., Macintosh, Michelakis, Hall & Taplin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.163-188 (p.170).
[23] J.E. Harrison, *Aspects, Aorists and the Classical Tripos* (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1919), p.5-6.
[24] Prins, 'OTOTOTOI: Virginia Woolf and the Naked Cry of Cassandra,' p.171.

was educated at home by a private tutor and consequently, was deprived of the same educational opportunities that her brothers enjoyed:

> As a result she held Greek, and men who could read it, in great awe, because it represented forbidden knowledge. Significantly, it was when she had met and declared her love for Shelley, over her mother's grave, that she began to learn the language. Her promise to Shelley that she 'will learn Greek,' written in a letter planning their elopement in 1814, suggests that she considered Greek a *rite de passage* to the illicit world of free love.[25]

Bradley and Cooper also found a language to articulate erotic experience in the ancient myths and literature of the Greeks.

Like other disciplines, Victorian Studies has been dramatically influenced by Foucault's multi-volumed, *The History of Sexuality.*[26] Foucault's Repressive hypothesis in relation to Victorian sexuality has proved to be incredibly stimulating for scholars and critics of the nineteenth century. For instance, one can detect Foucault's influence in the work of Richard Dellamora, Jeff Nunokawa and Linda Dowling, amongst many others. But, as a number of critics have pointed out, the basis of Foucault's analysis is always the active-passive polarity. Consequently, as Songe-Møller observes, 'Foucault hardly spares a thought for the necessary but miserable existence of those who exemplified passivity in ancient Athens. He seems to get carried away by his enthusiasm for the enviable privileges of those who were active- both sexually and politically.'[27] In an interesting article assessing the value of Foucauldian theory for Victorian Studies, Lee Behlman suggests that 'the *History of Sexuality*, and the classicists' recent engagements with it, provide a rich opportunity for reframing our understanding of *male lyric subjectivities* in Victorian poetry.'[28] Foucault's *History of Sexuality* is far less rich in terms of female subjectivities. As Amy Richlin notes, there are methodological, intellectual and moral

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[25] See Wallace, *Shelley and Greece*, p.34.
[26] The three volumes of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* were published before his death in 1984. Written in French in 1976, the first volume, *The Will to Knowlege* was translated into English in 1977, followed by *Volume Two: The Use of Pleasure* (London: Penguin, 1985) and *Volume Three: The Care of the Self* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).
[27] Songe-Møller, p.143.
[28] Lee Behlman, 'From Ancient to Victorian Cultural Studies: Assessing Foucault,' *Victorian Poetry* 41:4 (2003), 559-569 (560). My emphasis.

limitations to Foucault's representation of female sexuality.[29] Foucault's wider emphasis on the discursive and institutional representations of sexuality can, however, be highly suggestive. As a result, Foucauldian theory can be seen as an interesting point of departure, rather than an exact framework, for an analysis of sexuality and gender in the work of Michael Field.

In an important article concerning the history of lesbians and the lesbians of history, Chris White suggests that the literature and culture of ancient Greece offered male writers a 'whole canon of male-male bondings and love.' Women writers, on the other hand, had only 'one classical equivalent to draw upon for expressions and strategies of female-female love—the poetry of Sappho.'[30] White persuasively argues that in *Long Ago* Bradley and Cooper's complex appropriation of the poetry of Sappho is developed into a specific and strategic 'language of love between women.'[31] Prins also suggests that in *Long Ago* Bradley and Cooper 'locate their own lyrics in a figurative gap, an open space out of which the possibility of lesbian writing emerges.'[32] For Prins, the lacunae in the text of the Sapphic fragments, opens up a 'textual field that Bradley and Cooper may enter together as "Michael Field."'[33] Of course, it isn't just the gaps in the text, but the fragmentary nature of history and the lack of evidence concerning women's lives which allows for such dramatic revisions. Michael Field's female-centered Hellenism renders the late nineteenth century Hellenic counter-discourse of (homo)erotic liberation, open to the possibility of a 'lesbian' reading. Furthermore, in reclaiming the maenad as a figure of desire, Michael Field suggests that there are alternative female figures within the classical corpus capable of expressing female same-sex experiences.

The interpretation of Michael Field's Hellenism as a 'lesbian' counter-discourse is made more complex by the issue of Bradley and Cooper's personal relationship, as recalled in their letters and journals. As part of her discussion of *Long Ago,* White combines her reading of Field's Sapphic lyrics with provocative extracts from Katharine and Edith's diaries to support her interpretation of Michael Field's poetry as explicitly

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[29] Amy Richlin, 'Foucault's History of Sexuality: A Useful Theory for Women?' in *Rethinking Sexuality: Foucault and Classical Antiquity*, eds., Larmour, Miller & Platter (Princeton; Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp.138-170.
[30] Chris White, '"Poets and lovers evermore": The Poetry and Journals of Michael Field,' in *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing*, ed. Joseph Bristow (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.26-43 (p.28).
[31] White, '"Poets and lovers,"' p.26.
[32] Prins, *Victorian Sappho,* p.102.

sexual and homoerotic.[34] In (re)presenting Bradley and Cooper's relationship as a passionate, sexual partnership, White suggests that Michael Field's metaphorical representations of female passion and same-sex desire are indeed deliberate and strategically subversive.

Long Ago and the implications of reading the volume as a 'lesbian' text by 'lesbian' authors has, rightly, been the focus of much recent critical scholarship on Michael Field.[35] However, in keeping with Foucault, Michael Field's Hellenic poetics, like the Hellenism of Wilde, Pater and Symonds, has also been read as a 'coded' language of homoeroticism.[36] For instance, Leighton suggests that Bradley and Cooper employed a 'pagan subtext' through which they explored female sensuality.[37] Similarly, White notes that 'rather than inventing a vocabulary with an unmistakable precision of meaning,' Bradley and Cooper strategically 'deployed the language of classical scholarship' in order to talk about female desire.[38] It is difficult to see how a play like *Callirhoë* which explores the orgiastic worship of Maenads and the erotic poems of Lesbian maidens can be coded. Indeed, there is much to suggest that Bradley and Cooper openly celebrated eroticism rather than codified it.

I would like to draw attention to another aspect of Michael Field's Hellenic poetics. That Bradley and Cooper were able to articulate same-sex desire using Greek models is interesting in itself, but perhaps what is more interesting is the nature of the desire represented. Often the desire depicted between Bradley and Cooper's Greek maidens is violently passionate, sometimes painful and almost always physically consuming. As we will see, many of the central characters of *Bellerophôn*, *Callirhoë* and *Long Ago* suffer their desires. In most cases, the characters suffer not because their

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[33] Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, p.102.

[34] This biographical approach challenges Lillian Faderman's equivocal reading of Bradley and Cooper's personal relationship. See Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the* Present (London: The Women's Press, 1981, 1985), p.209-213.

[35] It certainly seems to be the case that Bradley and Cooper enjoyed a sexual relationship for a number of years. However, as Treby demonstrates in his introduction to *Uncertain Rain: The Sundry Spells of Michael Field* (De Blackland Press, 2002), not all of Bradley and Cooper's declarations of love are what they appear to be, p.14-16. Furthermore, as a number of critics have elucidated, the term 'lesbian' was historically available, but it had limited usage in the 1880s. Bradley and Cooper do not employ the term 'lesbian' in relation to themselves or their work.

[36] Linda Dowling interprets the homosexual Hellenism of Wilde et al as a 'coded' language of homoeroticism in her excellent study, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford.*

[37] Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, p.225.

[38] White, '"Poets and lovers,"' p.34.

desires are in any way aberrant, but because of the intensity of *eros*. Indeed, Bradley and Cooper associate the Dionysiac impulse for enthusiasm, experience and pleasure, with the often excruciating pleasures and pains of *eros*. This seemingly paradoxical combination of pleasure and pain, heavily reminiscent of Algernon Charles Swinburne's poetry, can be seen to form the basis of Michael Field's erotic aesthetic.

'Two Eager Scholars': The Miss-education of Michael Field

Like many middle-class Victorian girls, Katharine and Edith were initially educated at home. But, as Katharine was Edith's elder by sixteen years, their educational experiences differed considerably. Katharine was the youngest daughter of Charles and Emma Bradley, a respectable tobacco-merchant family from Birmingham. Katharine's father died of cancer when she was only two years old, leaving Emma Bradley, now a wealthy young widow, to bring up their two children. In the Bradley household, as Emma Donoghue observes, Katharine and her sister Lissie 'both benefited from their mother's belief in a liberal education. Instead of school, they had a series of tutors who taught them French, Italian, German, Classics and painting.'[39] Donoghue suggests that 'the Bradley girls' education was not meant to prepare them for any career but that of wife and mother.'[40] And yet, Emma Bradley's preference for private tuition over public schooling enabled her daughters to study subjects such as Latin and Greek, which were not widely available to state-educated young women. Clearly, not all private tuition was rigid and prescriptive.

Katharine's education was by no means limited to the domestic sphere. Following the death of her beloved mother in May 1868, Katharine took the opportunity to travel and to gain experience of the world. At twenty-two, Katharine enrolled, for a brief period, at the Collège de France. She spent many hours in art galleries and cafes, immersing herself in the art and culture of Paris.[41] Seven years later, still hungry for

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[39] See Emma Donoghue's fine short study of the two poets, *We Are Michael Field* (Bath: Absolute Press, 1998), p.14.

[40] Donoghue, p.14.

[41] Katharine's Parisian sojourn proved to be educational in more than one respect, when she became besotted with the brother of a friend with whom she was staying. The flirtation ended tragically and abruptly when Alfred Gérente died suddenly in his sleep.

knowledge and experience, Katharine attended Newnham College, in Cambridge, where she completed a summer course at the newly opened college for women. Her brief stay at the institution delighted her, despite her feelings of deficiency. Years later, having been invited to visit the College by the Principal, Miss Clough, Katharine declared with pride: 'I return to Newnham a poet and possessing a poet.'[42] Katharine's short summer at Newnham clearly galvanized her interest in education, for her next role was not as a student, but a tutor.

In 1873, Katharine moved to Solihull with her sister, Lissie's husband James and their two children Edith and Amy. Katharine took to 'teaching the chicks' and of an evening, writing lyrics. Her lone experiments in verse eventually culminated in the volume *The New Minnesinger,* published by Longmans in 1875. But her role as a tutor was as significant as her burgeoning writing career. As the spinster aunt, Katharine, in effect, became the governess of her nieces. But her experiences of higher education set her apart from most Victorian governesses. The curriculum set by Katharine was certainly untypical, as it is noted that by her early teens Edith was translating Virgil. Furthermore, at the age of twelve, Katharine's protégé had completed her first drama *The Iwl-Dû* and was at work on the Greek drama *Atys and Adrastos.*[43] *Atys* is clearly a concerted effort, on behalf of the young Edith, to produce a full-length Greek drama. Unfortunately, *Atys* remains a piece of juvenilia, as the play was never fully developed. Nevertheless, the play gestures towards the tragedies which Bradley and Cooper were to develop together as 'Michael Field.'

When, in 1878, the family moved to Stoke Bishop, a suburb of Bristol, the higher education of women became something of a family concern. Whereas Katharine's cousin Francis Brooks had gone to Balliol to study Classics, Edith and Amy, now teenagers, took the opportunity to join their aunt as students of the local University College. With a private income inherited from Charles Bradley's tobacco business, Katharine, Edith and Amy were free to dedicate their time and resources to prolonged personal study. Edith, growing increasingly attached to her intellectual aunt, accompanied Katharine in her

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[42] Diary entry dated February, 1891. Add. Mss 46779.

[43] The story of Atys is recounted in *The Histories* by the ancient Greek author Herodotus (i, 35-45). It is notable that the story of Atys features King Coresus. The play is contained in a notebook in the archives at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

studies as a Day student. As Katharine noted sometime later, 'Edith & I plunged into College life.'[44]

Bristol University College was established in 1876 and can be seen as one of the more progressive educational institutions of its day. Women could attend classes with their male contemporaries, both during the day and in the Evening. Scholarships were also made equally available to men and women. The syllabus of the College reflected the demands of a 'modern' industrial society, as outlined in the College's Calendar of 1878:

> The College is intended to supply for persons of both sexes above the ordinary school age the means of continuing their studies in Science, Languages, History and Literature, and more particularly to appropriate instruction in those branches of Applied Science which are employed in the arts and manufactures. Special attention is given to the teaching in class-rooms and laboratories, so as to ensure the thoroughness of the work done.[45]

Despite the scientific bias, Classics formed an integral part of the curriculum. Together, Katharine and Edith received tuition in Greek and Latin. In 1881, both women achieved Honours in Professor R. Fanshawe's course in Ancient History. The main thrust of lectures for this course was 'the place of Rome in universal history' and Roman 'law, language and politics in their permanent historic influences.'[46] There can be little doubt that this particular area of study greatly influenced the Roman plays of Michael Field.[47] Bradley and Cooper's education in Bristol was not just limited to the study of ancient history and languages. Both women received Honours in Moral Philosophy, Katharine received Honours in Modern History and Edith is listed as having achieved Class I in the study of Logic. Within such an environment of equality and encouragement, Katharine and Edith flourished.

It was about this time, as Donoghue observes, that Katharine aged thirty-two and Edith, sixteen, started 'behaving as a couple.'[48] That their sexual relationship developed at the same time as their intellectual partnership is suggestive. Katharine and Edith may be seen as more like Oxford undergraduates, exploring the potential of their same-sex

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[44] Quotation taken from Katharine's annotated version of *Callirhoë*, held by the Bodleian Library, MS.Eng.poet.e.70.
[45] University College, Bristol, *Calender* (1878).
[46] See University College, *Calendar* 1880-81, pp.41-42
[47] These compelling dramas still await in-depth analysis and, for the time being, remain out of the scope of this thesis.

relationship, than aunt and niece. In 'An Invitation,' published as part of the volume *Underneath the Bough* (1893), Katharine revealed the physical and intellectual intimacy between her and Edith, as they researched and wrote together in Katharine's study:

There's a lavender settee,
Cushioned for my sweet and me;
Ah, what secrets there will be
For love-telling,
When her head leans on my knee!

Books I have of long ago
And to-day; I shall not know
Some, unless thou read them, so
Their excelling
Music needs thy voices flow…

…All the Latins thou dost prize!
Cynthia's lover by thee lies;
Note Catullus, type and size
Least repelling
To thy weariable eyes.

And for Greek! Too sluggishly
Thou dost toil; but Sappho, see!
And the dear Anthology
For thy spelling.
Come, it shall be well with thee.

As the elder, more experienced reader, it is Katharine who invites, or rather entices the younger woman to join her in her intellectual pursuits. But Edith is a resisting reader, prizing 'all the Latins' over Katharine's beloved Greek.

It is interesting to compare the scenario set out in 'An Invitation'—of an older woman inspiring and guiding an intellectual gifted younger woman—with Walter Pater's Socratic tutorials at Brasenose College, Oxford. As Linda Dowling explains, Pater 'seems to have been persuaded that an education conducted along the old lines of Greek paiderastia— of an older man "inspiring" a younger "hearer" with "his won strength and

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[48] Donoghue, p.27.

noble taste in things"—would genuinely fulfill the liberal ideal of education.'[49] Katharine and Edith's 'educational' relationship certainly seems to echo Pater's tutorial technique. In a letter to an inquisitive Robert Browning, Edith described Katharine's inspirational influence: 'she has lived with me, taught me, encouraged me and joined me to her poetic life.'[50] But it would be misleading to suggest that the partnership of Bradley and Cooper was dominated or driven by Katharine. As the career of Michael Field developed, Edith's passion for Latin and Roman subjects gained precedence over Katharine's preference for Greek. Ultimately, Michael Field produced a total of six Roman dramas, as opposed to just three Hellenic volumes.[51]

Katharine was not to relinquish her role as a tutor for a number of years, as in 1887 she was still teaching students, other than Edith and Amy, at the family home in Bristol. Katharine's talent for teaching was equaled by her life-long enthusiasm for learning. Together with Edith she attended the theatre, opera, galleries, exhibitions, museums and public lectures; such as Gilbert Murray's lectures at the British Museum on Greek Art. Bradley and Cooper's cultural education also included travel and experiences abroad. The two women visited France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, where they absorbed all the local sights and sounds. Notably, the difficult journey to Greece was not on their itinerary.

Katharine and Edith's intellectual credentials and aesthetic proclivities granted 'Michael Field' access to the male-dominated intellectual and literary circles of the late nineteenth century. That is not to say that they did not enjoy friendships with other intellectual women. For instance, Bradley and Cooper were good friends with the Greek scholar and translator, Anna Swanwick. The two women also met Amy Levy, over whose suicide they gossiped with the poet Dollie Radford.[52] Bradley and Cooper also enjoyed a long friendship with the American feminist Mary Costello, before Costello married the flirtatious Bernhard Berenson.

Bradley and Cooper were highly conscious of the transgressive potential of Hellenism. To have such illicit knowledge and be in such exclusive company was thrilling, as Katharine shrewdly noted in their journal:

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[49] Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality*, p.102.
[50] Letter from Edith Cooper to Robert Browning, dated May 29th 1884, quoted in *Works and Days*, p.3.
[51] Bradley and Cooper worked on other Greek subjects, but only *Bellerophôn*, *Callirhoë* and *Long Ago* made it into print.

> Every day we are expecting the first copy of *Long Ago* (a specimen copy). Tiny marsh violets have been sent to Edith— they are like Violets that have put aside their loving, & made sly little scholars of themselves, mystic & 'beguiling' – tricky & fanciful – rather than luring and recluse.[53]

Bradley and Cooper had transformed themselves into 'sly little scholars,' with the erudition to beguile their readers. However, their new-found knowledge was not without cost. Despite the intellectual achievements of both women, Katharine later revealed her feelings of inadequacy and exclusion, when it came to matters of the mind: 'one sentence of Mr. Pater's which I could not say I would never forgive, because I recognised its justice; but from which I suffered, and which was hard to bear—that in which he speaks of the scholarly conscience as male.'[54] Katharine's revealing comment can be seen as the product of internalized sexism. But what is most interesting about Bradley's observation is that, despite her own laudable efforts and the changes taking place in the education system, Katharine still considered scholarship as a 'masculine' activity. Indeed, despite their friendships with other female scholars and translators such as Anna Swanwick, Bradley and Cooper frequently deferred to masculine authority where the classics were concerned.

The popular consensus of the day was that the openly intellectual woman was still considered to be the 'odd' woman. Two intellectual women—aunt and niece as well as lovers and poets—would have been considered, at best, peculiar. Little surprise, then, that a number of their friends considered Bradley and Cooper thoroughly eccentric. To make their intellectual and literary sophistication palatable for a hypocritical Victorian audience, Bradley and Cooper invented the persona of 'Michael Field.' Through their own efforts, Katharine and Edith, two highly educated, intensely creative Victorian ladies, had acquired the ability to 'mask' their intentions and hoodwink their audience.

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[52] Donoghue, p.60.
[53] Entry dated May 9th 1889, vol. no.46777.
[54] Sturgeon, *Michael Field*, p.137.

The Dramatic Mask of 'Michael Field'

Bradley and Cooper's myth-making really began with their pseudonym. The use of a pseudonym by women writers was not an unusual literary strategy in the nineteenth century. One thinks of George Eliot, Vernon Lee, Lucas Malet, George Egerton and Graham R. Thomson, amongst others. But why did literary women feel the need to write under an alternative gender identity? In *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter observes that from the mid-nineteenth century there is a noticeable increase in the use of the male pseudonym by women writers. Women had, apparently, become acutely aware of the need for role-play, in order to compete on equal terms with male writers. Showalter suggests that 'like Eve's fig leaf, the male pseudonym signals the loss of innocence. In its radical understanding of the role-playing required by women's effort to participate in the mainstream of literary culture, the pseudonym is a strong marker of the historical shift.'[55] Showalter depicts a male-dominated literary market-place hostile to female talent.

However, recent research suggests that women writers who wrote under male pen-names were not the simple victims of an overwhelmingly 'masculine' literary culture, and pseudonymous publication was more than a form of female self-repression. Research conducted by Gaye Tuchman, for example, indicates that pseudonymous publications were rare in the mid-nineteenth century; women writers were no more inclined to use pen-names than their male counterparts; both male and female authors were more likely to employ a pseudonym from their own gender and, perhaps most significantly, of the writers who published pseudonymously, men were more likely than women to use a cross-gendered *nom de plume*.[56] That is not to say that the nineteenth century literary market-place was equitable toward women, it was not. But the picture, as presented by Tuchman, is more complex than has been suggested thus far.

In a similar vein, Alexis Easley points out that recent theoretical re-conceptions of authorial identity suggest that 'while it is true that the Victorian publishing industry was discriminatory and that the Victorian author was often characterized as a man in critical

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[55] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p.10.

writing of the period, the masculinity of the popular author was far from stable.'[57] In other words, publishing under a male pseudonym was not a straightforward case of literary cross-dressing. Easley suggests that 'the rapid increase in the number of reviews theorizing the gender, sex, and class status of the author testifies to the instability of the authorial role in Victorian culture.'[58] It was not, therefore, the case that women simply exchanged their own unstable authorial identities for a solidly masculine persona. On the contrary, specificities of sex and gender could be deliberately obscured and complicated through pseudonymous and anonymous publication. As Easley explains, 'anonymous publication provided women with effective cover for exploring a variety of conventionally "masculine" social issues. It also allowed them to evade essentialized notions of "feminine" voice and identity.'[59] A pseudonymous identity could therefore be positive and liberating as well as challenging toward accepted notions of authorial identity. In addition, an obscure identity could complicate traditionally gendered expectations of genre and could foil the attacks of the notoriously partisan literary critics. Consequently, it might be more useful to view women's use of the male pseudonym as a consciously complex choice. But as aunt and niece, living and writing together, the choice of an appropriate *nominis umbra* was already a very complicated matter for Bradley and Cooper.

In 1875 Katharine Bradley invented her first duplicitous identity when she published *The New Minnesinger* under the male pseudonym of Arran Leigh. As a number of critics have noted, the name is an obvious reference to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's heroine, Aurora Leigh. That Bradley chose a male name to masquerade as the author of a volume of 'feminist' verse, suggests that the pseudonym was a ploy to deceive the critics and confound the public. In any event, *The New Minnesinger* did not enjoy the same critical praise as Browning's famous poem. Six years later, Edith joined Katharine to produce the Greek drama *Bellerophôn* (1881). This time Bradley and Cooper chose the distinctly heterosexual coupling of Arran and Isla Leigh to front the volume. The drama received little critical notice and the literary careers of Arran and Isla Leigh were abruptly

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[56] Tuchman's research is cited by Catherine A. Judd in, 'Male Pseudonyms and Female Authority,' in *Literature in the Marketplace*, eds., Jordan and Patten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.250-268, (p.251).

[57] Alexis Easley, *First-Person Anonymous: Women Writers and Victorian Print Media, 1830-70* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p.6.

[58] Easley, p.6.

ended. Blain suggests that part of their decision to dispense with a dual signature might have been 'the reluctance of either partner to adopt the "feminine" role.'[60] Yet, in June 1881, following the publication of *Bellerophôn*, John Addington Symonds was already aware that the volume had been written by two related female authors. Indeed, he was most 'most interested in the book, chiefly for the sake of what you tell me about the authoresses.'[61] Reluctant to be exposed, in any sense, 'Arran and Isla Leigh' were quickly consigned to history.

Over the next few years Bradley and Cooper worked, but never published, under the sign of John Cooley. As Treby observes, 'Cooley' is a conjunction of *Coo*per and Brad*ley*'s own surnames.[62] Interestingly, when the draft version of *Callirhoë* was sent to the publishers, the name of John Cooley graced the cover. However, when it came to publication, Katharine and Edith decided against the dual signature of 'John Cooley' preferring the singular, masculine, fabricated persona of 'Michael Field.' I suggest that it is the entirely fictitious nature of Michael Field which Bradley and Cooper found so appealing. After all, it was, in a very literal sense, their fiction which created the 'reality' of 'Michael Field.' Michael Field's existence was dependent upon the successful publication and critical reception of *Callirhoë*. And, with every publication, Bradley and Cooper added to the dramatic narrative of 'Michael Field.'

In 1907 Katharine revealed in a letter to William Rothenstein that the latest male pseudonym was not simply an arbitrary choice, the name had meaning. 'Michael' apparently signified the fiery archangel, whereas 'Field' denoted the pastures of the blessed.[63] The unification of these names indicates 'Michael Field's' lofty ambitions and their insistence on the inviolable unity of their collaboration. But as Treby points out, 'one does wonder, just a little, if Michael had re-invented the allusion; after all, 1907 was the year they became Catholics.'[64] Their conversion may well have prompted yet another re-fashioning of their identity, but Michael Field was the name which they adhered to for

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[59] Easley, p.1.
[60] Virginia Blain, 'Michael Field, the Two-Headed Nightingale: Lesbian Text as Palimpsest' in *Women's History Review*, 5:2 (1996), 239-257, (245).
[61] Letter from John Addington Symonds to Mr. Grislestone, dated June 30th 1881, included in Michael Field's journals, Add. Ms 46866-46867.
[62] Ivor C. Treby, *The Michael Field Catalogue: A Book of Lists* (De Blackland Press, 1998), p.66.
[63] This compelling piece of information was discovered by Virginia Blain and is discussed in her article, 'Michael Field: The Two-Headed Nightingale.' The letter forms part of the Rothenstein collection, housed at the Houghton Library at Harvard University.
[64] Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, p.17.

the rest of their careers. However, their new sobriquet did not necessarily render their other aliases obsolete, as Blain explains: 'the signature forms a kind of palimpsest, writing over (without obliterating) earlier meanings with later ones, just as the poets themselves recognised that their work would be read with a different meaning by later generations.'[65]

It is the singularity of the masculine pseudonym that makes 'Michael Field's' literary legacy so unique and complex, as Blain suggests:

> This signature throws up a number of interesting interpretative problems, very different from those more usually associated with the well-established convention of literary cross-dressing in the nineteenth century, made so fashionable by George Eliot. For instance, we might ponder how we can come to terms with the pseudonym 'Michael Field' as a sign of one proto-masculine persona, when it stands not for one woman, but for two, or for one of the two addressing the other, as in the case of 'A Palimpsest' and numerous other examples. It is worth noting that the initial pseudonyms chosen were rather different, and would have allowed for a much more conventional 'his-and-hers' approach.[66]

Despite the silk gowns and occasional declarations of prudishness, Bradley and Cooper were anything but conventional. In the case of 'Michael Field' the issue of collaboration is made even more complex by virtue of Katharine and Edith's familial and sexual relationship.

Despite the potential risks, Bradley and Cooper propagated a 'myth of unity,' regarding their collaboration.[67] It was, of course, a myth as the two women often recorded the details of their individual working patterns and the bruising process of editing one another's work. However, when Havelock Ellis, himself a literary collaborator, wrote to 'Michael Field' to ask which of the women had written certain works, Bradley described their collaboration in terms of marriage and of artistry: 'as to our work, let no man think he can put asunder what god has joined…the work is a perfect mosaic: we cross and interlace like a company of dancing summer flies.'[68] Bradley and Cooper clearly enjoyed the description of their collaboration as a divinely inspired marital union, as the metaphor was employed on a number of occasions. They considered

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[65] Blain, 'Michael Field: The Two-Headed Nightingale,' p.241.
[66] See Blain, p.244.
[67] The issue of collaborative 'unity' is discussed at some length by Prins in her chapter, 'Sappho Doubled: Michael Field,' in *Victorian Sappho*.

themselves 'closer married' than the Brownings, and in the prefatory poem to *Works and Days,* God is said to have joined the two women as 'Poets and lovers evermore.' The marriage metaphor does seem to have been employed as a provocative and playful reference to their sexual relationship. As Holly Laird observes, 'the pseudonym of Michael Field clearly enabled them to play a game with sexual as well as literary and gender identities. Like Eve's fig leaf, it became a sign that pointed to even as it concealed their transgressions.'[69]

Their 'transgressions' were less easy to conceal and more obviously sign-posted when Michael Field published the 'audacious' volume *Long Ago.* Michael Field's 'complex performance of the Sapphic signature: simultaneously single and double, masculine and feminine,' is, as Prins suggests, 'a name that opens itself up to multiple readings.'[70] The homosocial and homosexual connotations of the Sapphic signature, combined with an abstruse authorial identity suggest that Bradley and Cooper delighted in problematising conventional conceptions of 'sex' and 'gender.' If the signature of Michael Field is open to multiple interpretations, the sign also indicates unity. A number of critics have attempted to explain this collaborative relationship using a variety of imaginative metaphors. For Virginia Blain, Michael Field is the 'two-headed nightingale.'[71] Prins, on the other hand, labels Michael Field as 'Sappho Doubled.'[72] Whilst Chris White depicts Michael Field as the 'Tiresian Poet'; after Tiresias, the blind old sage from Greek myth, who is said to have experienced life both as a man and a woman. The gender-bending properties of Tiresias clearly appealed to Michael Field, as the Greek prophet unexpectedly (but quite deliberately) appears in *Long Ago.* Whatever your preference, 'Michael Field' is certainly a consciously contradictory identity.

Without jumping on the metaphorical bandwagon, I would like to suggest that, as a sign which encapsulates multiple identities in a single persona, the pseudonym of 'Michael Field' might be seen as a theatrical mask. Unlike Gilbert and Gubar, who describe the male pseudonym as a mask 'behind which the female writer could hide her disreputable femininity,' I would like to emphasize the creative possibilities provided by

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[68] See Katharine's letter to Havelock Ellis, quoted by Sturgeon, p.47.
[69] Holly Laird, 'Contradictory Legacies: Michael Field and Feminist Restoration' in *Victorian Poetry* 33:1 (1995), 111-129 (115).
[70] Prins, 'Sappho Doubled: Michael Field' in *Yale Journal of Criticism* 8 (1995a), 165-186, (165).
[71] Blain, 'Michael Field: The Two-Headed Nightingale.'
[72] Prins, 'Sappho Doubled: Michael Field.'

the pseudonymous mask.[73] A mask need not be considered simply as camouflage. For instance, J. Michael Walton suggests that in the ancient Greek theatre, a masked actor would help to focus the attention of the audience and keep the spectators from being distracted by 'side issues.'[74] In keeping with this approach, we can see the pseudonymous persona of 'Michael Field' as an attempt to focus the attention of a late Victorian audience on the work produced by Bradley and Cooper. The pseudonymous mask provided freedom for Bradley and Cooper to be creative, without the distracting 'side issues' of female authorship, collaboration and sexual and familial intimacy to cloud the judgments of the audience and critics.

The pseudonymous mask also suggests the possibility of simultaneously maintaining multiple identities. For example, an actor on stage is, at the same time, himself and someone else. Likewise, the ostensibly singular persona of 'Michael Field' is, in fact, a double-vision. Following the success of *Callirhoë,* Katharine adopted the name 'Michael' and Edith assumed the name of 'Field.'[75] Of course, the unification of these identities is intended to signify the creative unity of Bradley and Cooper and the singular artistic vision of 'Michael Field.' Paradoxically however, in taking the names of 'Michael' and 'Field,' Katharine and Edith highlight the duality and inherent instability of 'Michael Field,' the male Victorian poet.

These complex and contradictory subject positions are encapsulated in the dramatic mask. As Segal observes, the very artificiality of the mask indicates the arbitrary nature of all social and cultural symbol-systems, including models of acceptable behaviour: 'artificiality of theatricality opens up a suspended, privileged space within the society where the familiar laws and the familiar logic do not apply, where the spectator confronts a hidden, coexisting chaos within the ordered frame of the art-work, the society, and his own personality.'[76] Once we know that the mask is a mask, we can

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[73] Gilbert and Gubar, 'Ceremonies of the Alphabet: Female Grandmatologies and the Female Autograph' in *The Female Autograph*, ed. Donna C. Stanton (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1984), pp.21-48, (p.28).

[74] J. Michael Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice* (Westport & London: Greenwood Press, 1980), p.172.

[75] Bradley and Cooper were accustomed to multiple identities, as their journals and letters reveal a life-long predilection for nick-names. From letters and diaries, Ivor C. Treby has compiled a comprehensive list of Bradley and Cooper's favourite 'names, pet-names, pseudonyms and sobriquets.' At one time or another, Katharine was called Archangel, Felicity, Horse, Master, Michael, Queen, Simorg and Timmy. Edith, on the other hand, was known as Atthis, Boy, Daphne, Field, Henry, Muffie, Perpetua and Persian Puss. What is clear from these lists is Katharine and Edith's preference for male names. However, it is also clear that for both Katharine and Edith identity is mutable. See Treby, *The Michael Field Catalogue.*

[76] Charles Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*, p.224.

exchange our singular vision of the world for a double vision. Segal reminds us that the ancient spectator and the ancient actor knew very well the joy of full surrender to the illusion of the dramatic mask. As Segal notes, 'in the tragic theatre, as in the Bacchic ecstasy, the participant "stands outside" of himself: he temporarily relinquishes the safe limits of personal identity in order to extend himself sympathetically to other dimensions of experience.'[77] By reflecting on the illusory nature of the dramatic mask, the symbol invites the onlooker to try to distinguish truth and illusion in themselves.

That Bradley and Cooper were familiar with masks as literary devices can be seen from an intriguing poem written by Edith entitled 'The Mask.'[78] The evocative opening depicts a sacred wood; the typical dwelling of nymphs, or even Maenads:

> How bold the country where we danced…
> Great uplands, headed dark
> With trees, as if night's sombre mark
> Had sealed the vivid pasture hers,
> With seal of convocated firs—
> A noble country by her sign enhanced.

The protagonist is forced to pause, as a 'form' blocks her path: '"Who is this form I cannot pass?/ Who is she?" And they breathed a name I knew.' Her name is never revealed, but we are party to the moment of revelation:

> Powerless the Masker stood: I laid
> The velvet softness by.
> The curving mask…Oh, I should die
> To speak the bare face underneath;
> It were the last moan of my death…
> In cottage-smoke of age it will not fade.
>
> I shrieked and fled—how slow my feet,
> And wild as they were chained!
> She fled…but where she stood remained
> The empty sable mask. Alas,
> That I had cast it on the grass—
> O silent pastures and the bird's wing-beat!

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[77] Charles Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*, p.215
[78] 'The Mask' is included in the volume *Dedicated: An Early Work* (1914).

The masked figure is not alone, but is accompanied by other 'masqueraders on bright grass.' However, the narrator's focus is directed towards the masked figure: 'Why must I see her as once seen,/ With tender pearl of face, a sheen/ Of childhood in her face?' Treby suggests that Edith shrieks and flees from coming face to face with her *Doppel-gänger.*[79] Perhaps what this poem also reveals is Edith's confrontation with her younger, more passionate, pagan persona: 'How bold the country where we danced…'

For Chris White, the pseudonym of Michael Field 'is not a disguise. Nor is it a pretence at being a man.'[80] Certainly, there is no suggestion that Katharine and Edith wished to *be* men. Rather, what seems to have really inspired Bradley and Cooper is the suitably theatrical concept of performance. After all, Bradley and Cooper were, primarily, dramatists. Michael Field produced works in a variety of different forms, but drama was the medium that the two women most favoured. After years of close study, Bradley and Cooper were highly familiar with the conventions and possibilities of theatrical performance. Therefore, I suggest that the pseudonym should be seen as an attempt to *perform* the (contested) *rôle* of a Victorian man of letters. Indeed, White also observes that 'Michael Field the Poet is always presented as the highest point of their work.'[81]

Bradley and Cooper delighted in their successful performance as 'Michael Field'. When George Meredith wrote to ask '"which of us does the Males?"' the two women considered Meredith's inquiry as 'the highest compliment implied in any question asked of Michael.'[82] Meredith's question not only concerned the apparent 'authenticity' of Michael Field's male characters, but also the supposed indivisibility of Bradley and Cooper's collaboration. Meredith's inquiry, in other words, highlighted Bradley and Cooper's skilled, collaborative performance as 'Michael Field.' Katharine and Edith continued to perform the role of Michael Field, even when the real identities of the author(s) had become known. In 1891, for example, Bradley and Cooper met the voyeuristic Theodore Watts: 'Sim introduced me to Theodore Watts—he shook hands with the whole Michael & we formed a trio on the sofa. When he heard we were aunt & niece, he exclaimed "It is more like a fairy-tale than ever." He told us at once he was

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[79] Treby, *A Shorter Shīrazād* (De Blackland Press, 1999), p.101. Treby suggests that the poem was composed in 1905.
[80] Chris White, '"Poets and lovers evermore,"' p.40.
[81] White, '"Poets and lovers evermore,"' p.40.
[82] In *Works and Days*, p82.

deeply interested in our work.'[83] The myth of Michael Field had, by 1891, become a compelling narrative, in its own right. Nevertheless, this journal entry reveals the extent to which the pseudonymous mask enabled Bradley and Cooper to move freely between genders and personas.

As the patron god of the theatre, Dionysus is the pre-eminent symbol for the power of fictional representation and illusory drama. As Marilyn Katz explains, the conventions of the Greek tragic stage, 'required mimetic disguise, and its male actors assumed the masks and costumes of both gods and heroes, men and women, in tribute perhaps to the god's power as master of transformations, and especially to his androgynous character as "the double god," at once both masculine and feminine.'[84] As dramatists and devotees of the theatre, Bradley and Cooper were highly aware of the instability and mutability of gender, as can be seen in an unusual note from 1885. Bradley writes: 'Well Pussie, dear Elizabethan MAN I congratulate you; but what I am chiefly pleased to learn is that I am more vigorous than Pussie!!! the male part of Michael as beseemeth our relations.'[85] It can be seen, as Blain suggests, that Katharine teases Edith about the 'coveted' butch, or male role in their relationship, of which Katharine was, at this stage, 'firmly in possession.'[86] I would also suggest that Katharine's description of Edith as an 'Elizabethan MAN' again suggests theatrical performance.

Indeed, Bradley and Cooper's complex manipulation of identity seems to anticipate the work of Judith Butler. For Butler, the parodic repetition of gender exposes the illusion of gender identity as an inflexible inner essence: 'as the effects of a subtle and politically enforced performativity, gender is an "act," as it were, that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of "the natural" that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status.[87] In this context, the pseudonym can be seen to reflect Bradley and Cooper's desire to transcend gender and biological essentialism. The dramatic mask allows Bradley and Cooper to

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[83] Journal entry, dated 28th July, 1891, Add.Ms. 45854.
[84] Marilyn A. Katz, 'Daughters of Demeter: Women in Ancient Greece' in *Becoming Visible: Women in European Culture*, eds. Bridenthal, Stuart and Wiesner, 3rd ed. (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998), pp56-7.
[85] Quotation in Blain's article 'Michael Field, the Two-headed Nightingale,' p.249.
[86] Blain, 'Two-headed Nightingale,' p.249. Later, Edith played the role of 'Heinrich'; the ill patient of an amorous Schwester in a hospital in Dresden.
[87] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York & London: Routledge, [1990] 1999), p.187.

identify with male privilege and narrative authority, whilst simultaneously dramatizing masculinity and highlighting the artificiality of gender difference.

Unsurprisingly, the anonymity of Bradley and Cooper's carefully constructed pseudonym did not last long. An incensed Katharine wrote to Robert Browning, the source of the leaked 'secret,' reminding him that his indiscretion would effectively prejudice the critics against them; 'robbing us of real criticism, such as a man gives a man':

> It is said that the *Athenaeum* was taught by you to use the feminine pronoun. Again, someone named André Raffalovich, whose earnest young praise gave me genuine pleasure, now writes in ruffled distress; he "thought he was writing to a boy—a young man…he has learnt on the best authority it is not so." I am writing to him to assure him that the best authority is my work.[88]

Katharine's desire to maintain the coherent identity of 'Michael Field,' through the external, discursive practice of 'his' literature was, ultimately, doomed to failure.

Nevertheless, Bradley and Cooper's determination to 'be free' to say 'what the world will not tolerate from a woman's lips' surpassed their concerns about the vagaries of the marketplace:

> But I write to you to beg you to set the critics on a wrong track. We each know that you mean good to us: and are persuaded you thought that by 'our secret' we meant the dual authorship. The revelation of that would indeed be utter ruin to us; but the report of lady authorship will dwarf and enfeeble our work at every turn. Like the poet Gray we shall never 'speak out.' And we have many things to say that the world will not tolerate from a woman's lips. We must be free as dramatists to work out in the open air of nature – exposed to her vicissitudes, witnessing her terrors: we cannot be stifled in drawing- room conventionalities.[89]

Katharine describes herself and Edith as uncompromising Maenads, inspired by nature and free from social convention. Their self-defined roles as maenads and dramatists gave them the cultural space-'free of drawing-room conventionalities'- in which to enact their life-long performance as 'Michael Field.'

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[88] Letter from Katharine Bradley to Robert Browning, dated 23rd November 1884. Also cited by Sturgeon, p.6-7.
[89] Sturgeon, p.6-7.

The Virtues of Eros in Michael Field's *Bellerophôn*

Published in 1881 under the pseudonymous identities of Arran and Isla Leigh, *Bellerophôn* is not, technically speaking, a work by Michael Field. Nevertheless, *Bellerophôn* should be considered as a significant precursor to Michael Field's later Hellenic volumes *Callirhoë* and *Long Ago,* as *Bellerophôn* is the first of Bradley and Cooper's many narratives of erotic liberation. *Bellerophôn* lacks the narrative cohesion and intellectual integrity of *Callirhoë,* yet, the thematic and ideological continuity between the two dramas is striking. In *Bellerophôn* Bradley and Cooper can be seen to lay the foundations of Michael's Field's Hellenic principles; such as the virtues of Dionysiac enthusiasm, the pleasures of (homo)sexual desire, the reversal of traditional sex-roles and the importance of powerful archaic female figures. Other recurring themes include the pains and pleasures of forbidden love and the prevalence of sexual violence and erotic prohibition. As both perpetrators and victims, a number of the characters in *Bellerophôn* experience a shocking array of sexual and physical violence. Even at this early stage, Bradley and Cooper's pagan sensuality can be seen to be as disturbingly dark as it is celebratory. Eros is given free reign in Bradley and Cooper's dramas in order to undermine and challenge conventional conceptions of sexuality and gender. Like Eros, Dionysus does not appear as a character in Bradley and Cooper's first drama, but his disturbing, chaotic presence is everywhere felt. Consequently, we may consider *Bellerophôn* as the first fruit from the vine of Michael Field.

Throughout the five acts of *Bellerophôn,* Bradley and Cooper attempt to combine classical forms and motifs with passionate rhetoric and narrative excess. On an ideological level, Bradley and Cooper appear to owe a debt to the hedonistic Hellenism of Byron and Shelley. For Romantic writers like Shelley, as Jennifer Wallace suggests, 'Greece represented a pagan, Arcadian world of pleasure and license, an alternative to the orthodox system of rules, order and oppression.'[1] Bradley and Cooper's Hellenic dramas can be seen to share the same preoccupation with the uninhibited expression of the self and the veneration of pleasure as their Romantic precursors.

For Richard Jenkyns, however, the re-emergence of the sexual rebelliousness of

the late eighteenth century in the Hellenism of the late nineteenth century was anything but affirmative:

> Sexual rebellion, licentiousness, and that strange species of religious revolt which is almost a sort of religiosity, fired by a prurient fascination for the object of its attack, were features of English Hellenism that were soon to disappear; or rather to lie dormant, for lubricity and a febrile religiosity were both to be elements of in the decadent a decaying Hellenism of the late Victorian age.[2]

Jenkyns' formulation of a decadent Hellenism in late century contrasts sharply with the more liberal interpretations of critics like Richard Dellamora and Johnathan Dollimore.

Towards the end of the century the liberal sexual politics of the Romantic poets had become entwined with the ideology of Aestheticism. In the Hellenic writings of John Addington Symonds, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde we have what Dollimore might call a culturally affirmative transgressive aesthetic.[3] Whilst Dollimore emphasizes the affirmative aspects of 'sexual dissidence,' the focus of his study is male writers and male-identified aestheticism. Nevertheless, Richard Dellamora suggests that the dissident poetics of male aesthetes could be seen to have a universal appeal. In *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, for example, Dellamora highlights the ways in which women drew on 'the tactics of same-sex desire in male cultural production in order to (re)present women beyond the limits if the bourgeois sexual economy.'[4] However, the classical tactics of male aesthetes were often resolutely androcentric.

It is therefore necessary to sound a note of caution with regard to the sexual politics of late Victorian Aestheticism. Whilst situating Bradley and Cooper within the Aesthetic movement of the late nineteenth century, Kathy Psomiades suggests that often the transgressive sexual politics of Aestheticism were more liberatory for men than for women.[5] In a similar vein, Martha Vicinus suggests that the aestheticism of late century was an attractive option, but 'it needed to be purged of its misogyny and ennui.'[6] In his

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[1] Jennifer Wallace, *Shelley and Greece*, p.55.
[2] Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, p.4.
[3] In particular, Dollimore notes Wilde's 'transgressive aesthetic,' in his ground-breaking work *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), p.4 and *passim*.
[4] See Dellamora introductory remarks in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp.1-17 (p.8).
[5] See Kathy Psomiades's article "Still Burning from This Strangling Embrace": Vernon Lee on Desire and Aesthetics in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* (see Dellamora, above). pp. 21-41 (p.21).
[6] Martha Vicinus, 'The Adolescent Boy: Fin-de-Siècle Femme Fatale' in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*

sociological study of Victorian sexuality Michael Mason observes that 'the agenda of late nineteenth century sexual liberation was self-servingly devised by men, and spurious in its apparent concern for women.'[7] Angela Leighton also describes the aesthetic fashion of late Victorian culture as 'self-consciously and self-admiringly male.'[8] Bradley and Cooper managed to carve themselves a space within the discourse of Aestheticism, but their female-centered Hellenism is decidedly different from the seditious poetics of Pater, Symonds and Wilde. Like their male counterparts, Bradley and Cooper employed Hellenism as a liberal discourse, through which they could explore the social, political and religious implications of Greek *eros* and Dionysian enthusiasm. But unlike their male contemporaries, their work not only includes female experience and perspectives, but can be seen as inclusive in a much wider sense.

The myth of Bellerophôn is an interesting vehicle for Bradley and Cooper's first narrative of erotic liberation, not least because the myth seems more concerned with erotic prohibition than sexual freedom. In Book VI of *The Iliad*, Homer recalls the story of Bellerophôn, the young handsome prince who overcomes a series of violent trials before he is rewarded for his heroism. Homer tells us that after being forced to leave Argos, Bellerophôn travels to the ancient city of Tiryns and the court of King Proetus. There, the King's wife, Antea (also known as Stheneboea) falls passionately in love with the pious youth, but he rejects her advances. In revenge, the Queen tells Proetus that Bellerophôn has tried to seduce her, whereupon the King dispatches the young prince to Lycia and the court of his brother Iobates. Unbeknownst to him, Bellerophôn carries a letter from Proetus, instructing his brother to kill the young man. A complicit Iobates sends Bellerophôn on a supposedly suicidal mission, to destroy the feared Chimaera. Aided and abetted by the gods, Bellerophôn manages to slay the Chimaera and secure his reputation as a hero. He subsequently completes a series of potentially fatal missions and earns the respect of Iobates, who rewards him with his daughter's hand in marriage and a grand estate in Lycia. Bellerophôn's happiness does not last however, as his children are pursued and killed by the gods who had previously supported him.

Apollodorus recalls a similar version of the myth, but in other ancient versions

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(see Dellamora, above), pp. 83-106 (p.91).
[7] Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.38.
[8] Angela Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, p.217.

Bellerophôn is said to suffer a different fate.[9] After killing the Chimaera, Bellerophôn feels disassociated from an ungrateful and, to him, inferior humanity. He consequently resolves to join the gods on Mount Olympus. However, the gods take unkindly to the hubris of the young mortal. During his ascent to the heavens Zeus punishes him for his arrogance by striking him with a lightening bolt. In some accounts Bellerophôn survives the lightening strike, to wander the earth a melancholy outcast. Indeed, it is as a hubristic fallen hero that Bellerophôn makes a brief allegorical appearance in Milton's *Paradise Lost.*

Whilst Bradley and Cooper retain much of the central story of Bellerophôn, they also make a number of significant adaptations and additions to Bellerophôn's mythological narrative, particularly with regard to the young hero's supposedly redoubtable sexual morality. In the *Iliad* Bellerophôn's heroic masculinity is directly linked with his virility, not his virtuous virginity. But in *Bellerophôn* Bradley and Cooper seek to reverse the paradigmatic classical narrative of the violently abused female virgin.[10] Bradley and Cooper's Bellerophôn believes that in order to fulfill the demands of heroic masculinity, he must renounce love and abstain from the pleasures of the flesh. Yet, his blind faith in self-renunciation and chastity is eventually overwhelmed by the forces of *eros*. It is this battle, between *eros* and conventional notions of virtue, and not the conquest of the Chimaera, which forms the basis of Bradley and Cooper's drama.

Despite the relative obscurity of the myth, Bellerophôn was in fact quite a popular subject in terms of literary representations in the nineteenth century. Writers such as James Lowell, Barry Cornwall, John Stuart Blackie and George Meredith all wrote variations of the myth. But perhaps one of the most interesting representations of Bellerophôn is by William Morris in *The Earthly Paradise* (1857). Unusually, Bellerophôn appears twice in Morris's epic. The classical tale for January depicts the story of 'Bellerophon at Argos,' whilst the tale for February is entitled 'Bellerophon in Lycia.' As Florence Boos suggests, Morris recasts the myth(s) of Bellerophôn as tales of heroic atonement and as psychological studies of despair and tempered redemption.[11]

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[9] See Appollodorus, *Library and Epitome* (2.3.1). Other possible sources include Hesiod's *Theogony* (319), Pindar's *Odes* 13, 84 (120) and the *Fabulae* of Hyginus (57).

[10] Note Bradley and Cooper's archaic spelling of the hero's name. This may be seen as an attempt for scholarly accuracy and 'authenticity.'

[11] See Boos' commentary to Morris's *The Earthly Paradise*, in 2 vols., ed. Florence Boos (New York; London: Routledge, 2002), vol. II, p.498.

Bradley and Cooper's narrative is similar to Morris's depiction of 'Bellerophon at Argos.' Indeed, there are numerous medieval images in Bellerophôn which may be compared with Morris's narrative. However, whereas Morris is quite faithful to the ancient legend of Bellerophôn, Bradley and Cooper are far more creative with plot and character. Further, Bradley and Cooper's Bellerophôn is much less heroic, less chivalric and less virtuous than Morris's creation.

The strongest allusion in Bradley and Cooper's heavily inter-textual narrative is to an ancient text, Euripides' *Hippolytus.*[12] The opening sequence, which describes Anteia's lust for Bellerophôn, closely resembles Phaedra's love for her step-son in the *Hippolytus.* Indeed, the resemblance is so strong that the famous Hellenist John Addington Symonds, in an informal review of *Bellerophôn,* wondered whether the 'authoresses' had 'come across Miss Mary Robinson's "Crowned Hippolytus," a very admirable translation of Euripides' play.'[13] It is difficult to determine if Bradley and Cooper were aware of Mary F. Robinson's translation before they wrote *Bellerophôn*, as both books were produced in the same year by the same publisher, Kegan Paul & Company. Nonetheless, it is interesting that Mary Robinson was also drawn to Euripides's great drama on virtue and passion.[14]

Other contemporary antecedents to Bradley and Cooper's *Bellerophôn* might be Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) and 'Phaedra' (1866).[15] Richard Jenkyns suggests that, consciously or unconsciously, Swinburne modeled *Atalanta* upon Euripides' *Hippolytus.*[16] Despite professing his detestation of Euripides, Swinburne returned to the Hippolytus myth in his 'Phaedra' (1866). The similarities between Swinburne's characters, such as Atalanta, Phaedra and Hippolytus and the characters of Anteia and Bellerophôn, from Bradley and Cooper's drama, are indeed compelling. It would, therefore, seem to be the case that both Swinburne and Bradley and Cooper employ Euripides' *Hippolytus* as a central source.

Bradley and Cooper's allusion to the myth of Hippolytus is highly suggestive on a

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[12] Bradley and Cooper not only allude to the popular myths of Bellerophôn, they also refer to Euripides' *Bacchae* and the Homeric Hymns in the course of their narrative.

[13] Extract from a letter by John Addington Symonds to Mr Grislestone, dated June 30th 1881. The letter is included in the journals of Michael Field, Add. Ms. 46866-46867.

[14] For an interesting, metrical reading of Robinson's translation see Yopie Prins' '"Lady's Greek" (With the Accents): A Metrical Translation of Euripides by A. Mary F. Robinson,' *Victorian Literature & Culture* 34 (2006): 591-618.

[15] 'Phaedra' was published in the first edition of Swinburne's notorious volume *Poems and Ballads* (1866).

number of different levels. As Barbara Goff observes, the tension, or opposition, between concealment and revelation, is part of the dynamic of *Hippolytus*. For Goff, 'the play can be read as an overall structure of blocked revelations and failed attempts at concealment.'[17] Similarly, in *Bellerophôn*, the overall structure reflects the tense dynamic between concealment and revelation, between sexual suppression and the potential for fulfillment. *Hippolytus* is also a play about the dangers of incestuous sexual desire. That Bradley and Cooper chose to flirt with this theme at such an early stage in their career indicates their confidence in their own literary abilities to conceal, and also to partially reveal. For John Addington Symonds, however, 'the kind of love described' in *Bellerophôn* is apparently 'over-warm for the Greek taste, & very crude for the modern.'[18] Bradley and Cooper's representation of female sexual desire is at least as 'warm' as Phaedra's desire in Euripides' *Hippolytus*. And it may be seen that in *Bellerophôn* they tackle their desiring subject with considerable enthusiasm.

The destructive desire which affects Euripides' Phaedra also afflicts Bradley and Cooper's Anteia. However, Bradley and Cooper's female protagonist is not the modest, honourable paragon of Euripides' drama. Unlike her Euripidean counterpart, Anteia is a brazen adulteress who cannot and will not conceal her lust for Bellerophôn. Moreover, Anteia demonstrates little respect, or concern, for social convention and morality.[19] Anteia shamelessly craves the young prince as the 'sun-parched lips/ Crave drink.' For the Queen of Argos, sexual satisfaction is not an indulgent pleasure, but a primal need that cannot be tempered by morality.

In a deliberate role-reversal of conventional gender relations, Bellerophôn is the beautiful object of desire. Like the idealized Greek statues which adorned the corridors of the British Museum in the nineteenth century, Bellerophôn seems to ignite fascination and desire in all who look on him. Indeed, Anteia reveals that she is not the only one to be bewitched by Bellerophôn's beauty:

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[16] Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, p.107.
[17] Barbara Goff, *The Noose of Words: Readings of desire, violence and language in Euripides' Hippolytus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.12-13.
[18] Extract from a letter dated June 30th 1881, included in the journals of Michael Field, Add. Ms 46866-46867.
[19] In her adulterous lust, Anteia also has something of William Morris's Guenevere about her. In his dramatic monologue, 'The Defence of Guenevere' Morris represents the queen of Camelot as an unrepentant scarlet-woman.

Thou art so beautiful,
The very slaves about my house break off
Their toil, and in a wonder stare at thee;
My women leave my half-wreathed hair unbound
If thou but pass by my chamber-door; the King
Looks for thee on the field, and in the chase,
And never in the banquet finds content
If thou fill not the cup. My lord hath taught
Me what is worshipful, and I have drunk
Thy sweet praise in, till I am sick for thee,
And crave thee (I, i)

Bradley and Cooper's drama not only privileges the female gaze but, in referring to the longing looks of the King, also seems to parody the homoerotic gaze, as espoused by critics like Winckelmann and Pater. As Hilary Fraser observes, 'Michael Field, as the single male persona of two lesbian spectators/poets, offers such a different model of visual consumption.'[20]

The Court of Argos is seemingly a world of polymorphous passions, projected on to the figure of the young male. Interestingly, Martha Vicinus suggests that in the late Victorian period many artists and writers, of both sexes, appropriated the figure of the young male, in order to explore emotional and sexual issues:

> Of indeterminate character, this handsome liminal creature could absorb and reflect a variety of sexual desires and emotional needs. He personified a fleeting moment of liberty and of dangerously attractive innocence, making possible fantasies of total contingency and total annihilation. For men, the boy suggested freedom without committing them to action; for women, he represented their frustrated desire for action. But most of all, his presence in fin-de-siècle literature signified the coming of age of the modern gay and lesbian sensibility: his protean nature displayed a double desire—to love a boy and to be a boy.[21]

Vicinus goes on to suggest that lesbians looked to the boy because he represented 'a transvestic disguise that permitted either sexual or emotional aggression.'[22] In keeping with this approach, Anteia's lust for Bellerophôn may therefore be seen to reveal

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[20] Hilary Fraser, 'A Visual Field: Michael Field and the Gaze' in *Victorian Literature and Culture* 34 (2006), 553-571, (556).
[21] Martha Vicinus, 'The Adolescent Boy: Fin-de-Siècle Femme Fatale?' p.83-84.
[22] Vicinus, p.85.

'masked' lesbian desire. However, later in the drama, when Phêmê declares her unabashed love for women, there is little attempt to conceal 'lesbian' desire.

Vicinus also argues that some women writers, like male homosexuals, might be drawn to the figure of the male adolescent, as he represented the lost, special qualities of spiritual purity and chaste innocence. Bellerophôn certainly begins Bradley and Cooper's drama representing spiritual purity and chastity. But Bradley and Cooper do not really admire his pious chastity, nor do they allow him to maintain his purity. Instead, Bradley and Cooper revel in corrupting Bellerophôn and in bringing about his spectacular downfall. Far from being revered, the adolescent male is fair game. Undoubtedly, the male adolescent can be seen as a useful figure for adventurous sexual exploration and alternative artistic subjectivity. But his presence does not necessarily supplant or negate the role of the actively desiring female subject. After all, Bradley and Cooper's drama is more about revelation than repudiation. Consequently, although Bellerophôn holds the title role, the drama is as much about women's transgressive sexual identities, as it is about the possibilities offered by the androgynous adolescent male.

In an interesting reversal of gender stereotypes, Anteia's heterosexual passion for Bellerophôn causes her pain and suffering. In line with Euripides, we must consider that Anteia is the victim of Aphrodite; the victim of a sensual, all-consuming passion over which she has no control. Aphrodite does not appear as a character in *Bellerophôn*, but like Dionysus, her influence is ubiquitous. For the Greeks, desire was closely associated with Aphrodite. Vernant observes that 'almost from the moment of her birth, Aphrodite is framed between Eros and Himeros, Love and Desire who thereafter never leave her side.'[23] Despite her reputation for love and romance, the erotic gifts of the goddess were not always positive and a cause for celebration. In many Greek sources desire is frequently referred to in terms of pain, disease or madness. Indeed, Freud's later conflagration of *eros* with the death-drive, *thanatos,* suggests the dangerous consequences of unfettered desire to the self. Zeitlin suggests that *eros* is considered dangerous because, while it answers 'most deeply to human needs of dependency, reciprocity, and empathy, it is also perceived to threaten most seriously the boundaries of the autonomous self and under the magnetic pull of desire to put the self in the power of

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[23] Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*, ed. Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.97.

an other.'[24] The youthful and inexperienced Bellerophôn is willing to join with another, but his companion is not his lover, she is the virgin goddess Athena.

According to the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, there are only a few beings capable of withstanding Aphrodite's power; they are Athena, Artemis and Hestia. That only female goddesses are resistant to the charms of Aphrodite would seem to tell us that, for the Greeks, the virginal body can only be imagined in terms of femininity. And yet, Bellerophôn's devotion to Athena suggests that virginity is a transcendental state, which surpasses the laws of nature and the conventions of gender. Importantly, the role of the *parthenos,* the juvenile virgin, is a transitory state. Bellerophôn should graduate from the role of *parthenos* to the role of citizen, *andres*, by passing an initiatory test, such as killing the Chimaera. However, as a devotee of Athena, Bellerophôn must remain a virgin in permanent denial of *eros*. But in choosing perpetual virginity over the demands of *eros* Bellerophôn arrests his personal development in a most unnatural way, as Loraux explains:

> Athena is the Parthenos who remains a *parthenos*, a figure impossible in the human world, but among the gods, her role represents security itself for the *andres*: the security of the hero, whose exploits Athena attends, the security of the citizen, whose *polis* she protects, the security of the male, comforted in his fantasy of a world without women by the idea that his goddess at least was not born from a woman's body— she who "was not nourished in the darkness of the womb."[25]

As Nicole Loraux suggests, the permanent *parthenos* is a 'figure impossible in the human world.' Yet, the arrogant and ignorant Bellerophôn believes that he can achieve transcendence and resist the lure of adult sexuality by becoming a soldier of Athena.

However, as a guardian of virtuous young men, Athena is a problematic figure. As Vernant tells us, Athena is intelligence incarnate, a sovereign master of 'the art of cunning intelligence, ingenious stratagems, skillful know-how, shrewd lies.'[26] Athena, therefore, represents the force of the intellect over emotion, of rational thinking over physical sensations; she *is* inhuman wisdom. Furthermore, Athena is also a wild figure; a warrior with the face of a Gorgon on her breast. She is not, therefore, a woman to love;

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[24] Froma I. Zeitlin, 'The Power of Aphrodite: Eros and the Boundaries of the Self in the Hippolytus' in *Directions in Euripidean Criticism*, Ed. Peter Burian (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), pp52-111 (p.56).
[25] Nicole Loraux, *The Children of Athena: Athenian Ideas About Citizenship and the Division Between the Sexes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.11.
[26] Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals*, p.45.

she is an unobtainable goddess who demands reverence. In choosing Athena and rejecting *eros,* Bellerophôn forsakes the common bonds of humanity. With the support of Athena he may well be a hero, but he will be a hero without empathy. He will therefore remain a child of Athena; a virgin without the capacity for love.

In contrast, Anteia is the anti-thesis of a female guardian of virtue. Anteia's (indecent) proposal to Bellerophôn for non-marital sexual intercourse suggests that she is anything but a domestic goddess. Indeed, she is far from the custodian of male virtue as depicted by nineteenth-century moralists such as Sarah Stickney Ellis. In her best-selling guidebook to morality, *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits,* Ellis declared that it was a woman's duty to be for her man 'a kind of second conscience, for mental reference, and spiritual counsel, in moments of trial.'[27] Famously, in the mid-nineteenth century, Coventry Patmore sang the virtues of the paragon of self-renunciation, in the 'Angel in House' (1854). The (somewhat unfortunate) legacy of Patmore's pernicious Angel extended well beyond the Victorian period. John Ruskin, Katharine's former mentor, echoed the moralistic sentiments of Ellis, Patmore and others later in the century. In *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) Ruskin, rather unreasonably, proclaimed that women should be 'enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise—wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fail from his side.'[28] If Katharine Bradley ever took any real notice of Ruskin's teachings, she surely never subscribed to this doctrine.

The power of Bradley and Cooper's female protagonist lies not in her capacity for self-renunciation, but in her ability to corrupt. Anteia's human frailties, her sexual needs, are deliberately juxtaposed with Athena's divine purity. By contrasting the frigid, childless Athena with the womanly, sensuous Anteia, Bradley and Cooper demonstrate that, as a woman, Anteia will never be able to reach the heights of a goddess. This juxtaposition is Bradley and Cooper's classical version of what Freud would famously call the Madonna/whore syndrome. Bradley and Cooper suggest that purity, if there is such as thing, is a divine attribute and its attainment should be the preserve of the gods.

As a woman who demands sexual gratification and refuses the 'virtues' of

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[27] Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (1839), p.46.
[28] John Ruskin, 'Of Queens' Gardens' in *Sesame and Lilies* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1865), p.117.

feminine self-sacrifice, Anteia fails to comply with Victorian social expectations and Greek aristocratic standards. Indeed, Bellerophôn's hostile reaction to Anteia's erotic declarations suggests that both the Greeks and the Victorians shared a profoundly negative view of female sexuality. Unlike Euripides' Phaedra and Swinburne's Althaea, there is no suggestion that Anteia is a mother-figure to Bellerophôn. Consequently, Anteia's sexual demands are not directly tainted by the implication of incest. Nevertheless, Bellerophôn describes Anteia's pro-active passion for him in terms of pestilence and infection. Her love is a plague, a disease from which Bellerophôn desires to be immunized:

> Some thoughts there are so vile, speech bears their stain
> Indelibly; one cannot deal in words
> With wickedness such as thou dreamest of.
> Thyself thou hast polluted with thy dream,
> Making thy beauty an embodied shame,
> And my fond loyalty disgrace; —as soon
> Pity the carrion rotting in the sun
> Quick of its own corruption. Thou art vile,
> So that compassion sickens to disgust,
> And the pure-nostrilled loathe thee. I must hence
> To an untainted air.
>
> (I, i)

By equating Anteia with fetid carrion and the fire-breathing Chimaera, Bellerophôn suggests that Anteia's bestial sexuality threatens to release the forces of degradation. In truth, Anteia is conceived of as corrupt(ing) because she is a woman who refuses to conform to conventional notions of femininity and sexual propriety. Bellerophôn's description of Anteia can therefore be seen as a sardonic caricature of Victorian gender roles. Unsurprisingly, Bradley and Cooper, at this point naming themselves Arran and Isla Leigh, were obviously quite keen to play with the idealized expectations of male and female behaviour.

Conceptions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' changed over the course of the nineteenth century, inspired by rapidly developing social and economic conditions. In *Victorian Masculinities*, Herbert Sussman demonstrates that the notion of 'manliness' was constructed, in the first half of the nineteenth century, in response to the demands of industrialization and subsequent changes in the class system.[29] Thaïs E. Morgan suggests

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[29] See Herbert Sussman's, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

that 'the other major force in the Victorian ideal of manliness was the increasing presence of women as moral guides and popular writers in English culture since the later part of the eighteenth century.'[30] Indeed, the plethora of conduct books which emerged in the mid-nineteenth century demonstrates the extent to which femininity and masculinity were highly contested concepts.

For the most part, the dominant bourgeois morality suggested that the 'womanly' Victorian woman was, as Julia Saville observes, 'expected to be guileless' and 'the mistress of self-restraint and maidenly modesty.' While she was required to be 'strong in moral convictions, she was not expected to voice these in public, or to indulge in any form of self-promotion, but to efface herself in the service of her husband, her children and the household's welfare.'[31] The social expectations of 'manly' Victorian men were also absurdly high:

> The hallmark of ideal Victorian manliness was scrupulous self-management or asceticism. The manly citizen, even as he was required to be forthright and unequivocating, was also expected to be a master of self-restraint. Manly reserve was supposedly an index of the depth of moral character; however, it could also be interpreted as sinister withholding or the cultivation of secrets.[32]

As Saville notes, the 'very tension between forthrightness and restraint, transparency and modesty, made "manliness" and "womanliness" highly unstable terms, apparently oppositional, but constantly threatening to collapse into each other.'[33] However, domestic masculinity also had to contend with the specter of heroic masculinity, as represented by the chivalric knight or the ancient Athenian ideal. Indeed, the revival of medievalism and classicism in Victorian literature frequently placed the issue of heroic masculinity centre stage.

The charge of 'effeminacy,' of acting contrary to the ideal of civic masculinity, was brought to public attention and extended to literature by Robert Buchanan, in his now infamous attack on the 'Fleshly School' of poetry.[34] Buchanan positioned Dante

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[30] Thaïs E. Morgan, 'The Poetry of Victorian Masculinities' in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 203-227 (p.203).
[31] Julia F. Saville, 'Marriage and Gender' in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, eds., Cronin, Chapman and Harrison (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 526-542 (p.527).
[32] Saville, p.527.
[33] Saville, p.527.
[34] Under the pseudonym of 'Thomas Maitland', Buchanan published 'The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr D.G. Rossetti' in *Contemporary Review* (October, 1871), 334-50.

Gabriel Rossetti, Algernon Swinburne and William Morris as '*public offenders,*' spreading the seeds of moral disease through their work. Buchanan's attack was carefully calibrated to draw on the discourse of disease which emerged with the instigation of the Contagious Diseases Acts in the 1860s. A central feature of the debates about sexual hygiene was the high moral tone and Christianized notions of sin.[35]

Morgan suggests that Buchanan's attempt to revive the concept of civic masculinity depended on 'an analogy between the individual public man—the soundness of his character and the rightness of his behaviour—and the best possible state of society as a whole.'[36] Buchanan's ideas about what constituted civic masculinity were not only founded on Christian concepts of purity, however. His conception of 'manliness' was also informed by a tradition of classical republican thought which had come to dominate civic discourse in England from the seventeenth century.

For classical philosophers like Plato and Aristotle 'virtue' and citizenship encompassed the scrupulous management of one's private desires in conjunction with public duties. In *Rhetoric* Aristotle highlights the interrelation between the body of the individual and the body politic: 'the relationship with oneself [is considered to be] isomorphic with the relationship of domination, hierarchy, and authority.'[37] Whilst the virtuous citizen would partake in work, military duty and duties to the state, the vice-ridden citizen would indulge in laziness and 'licentiousness' with women, youths or slaves. As Morgan observes, in contrast to the 'network of terms and concepts tying the polity to *vir* or masculinity, the *effeminatus* is the man who has neither *virtus* or *vis*, neither virtue nor strength, neither self-control nor right to the power of a public man within society.'[38] Morgan points out that, in applying the discourse of effeminacy to Victorian society of the 1870s, Robert Buchanan not only poses as a patriot but also as a Carlylean sage; he is a "physician," who has 'come to "put his finger in the true seat of the sore" of "Sensualism" which is currently destroying the nation.'[39] But instead of mobilizing the forces of Victorian moral propriety, Buchan's tirade opened the door for

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[35] See Davidson & Hall's, *Sex, Sin and Suffering: Venereal Disease and European Society Since 1870* (New York: Routledge, 2001).
[36] See Morgan's discussion of the 'Fleshly School' controversy in her article 'Victorian Effeminacies' in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* (see Dellamora above), pp.109-125.
[37] Aristotle, *Rhetoric,* in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, revised Oxford Translation*, ed., Johnathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2: 289.
[38] Morgan, 'Victorian Effeminacies,' p.112.
[39] Morgan, 'Victorian Effeminacies,' p.112.

scholars like John Addington Symonds and Walter Pater to develop a counter-discourse, based on an alternative reading of classical civic masculinity.

Bradley and Cooper seem to have been highly aware of the discourse of effeminacy and the deepening sense of crisis concerning masculinity. When, for example, Bellerophôn reveals his deep anxiety that 'this sharp trouble pressing at my heart' will 'obstruct my manhood from its perfect play,' he is talking about the dangers of effeminacy (I, iv). And, when the young prince declares that he will crush the emotional pangs in his chest 'as Amazons crush/ The hindering breast,' Bellerophôn is less than convincing against his own charge of effeminacy (I, iv). His desires, his emotional self is, after all, not a physical feature that can be removed or disregarded. For Bradley and Cooper, morality and unattainable social and religious ideals pervert identity, not 'monstrous' female sexuality.

Nevertheless, Bellerophôn is more than willing to project his anxieties and inadequacies onto the scapegoat figure of Anteia. Her love for him has 'besmirched the glow/ Of simple rapture in my herohood.' In order to fulfill his desire to be a hero and discharge the responsibilities of civic masculinity, Bellerophôn supposes that he must channel his desires, the forces of *eros,* toward combat and religious devotion:

> Oh, how
> Shall I endue my spirit for that strife
> Who am not master of my baser self?
> Ye gods, defend my spirit's citadel
> From this insidious foe, that impotent
> Assails the gates: there is a secret path,—
> Keep it, ye pure Invincible. (I, iv)

The young prince believes that (hetero)sexual desire is inconsistent with the demands of heroic masculinity.[40] He hopes to re-assert his masculinity based on moral *ascesis,* or self-discipline. Furthermore, Bellerophôn's concern that he should be able to 'master his baser self,' reflects not only Victorian debates about masculinity and religious arguments about renunciation but also contemporary scientific theories. The notion that there was a primal aspect to human beings, which could be overcome by modern intellectual,

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[40] In desiring to become the triumphal warrior, Bellerophôn recalls a number of famous knights from Victorian literature including Arnold's Tristram and Tennyson's Arthur and Lancelot. Arnold and Tennyson depict the fatal 'feminization' of their heroes, as a result of their love for women.

industrial man, was expounded by evolutionary theories of the mid-nineteenth century. Freed from the base necessity of instinctual animal reproduction, men could channel their energies into 'higher,' intellectual pursuits. Women, on the other hand, were not so fortunate, ruled, as they were perceived to be, by the primal drives of their bodies.

Predictably, male transcendentalism was not just supported by contemporary scientific discourses, but also by the authoritative teachings of classical philosophy. As we have already seen, in the pedagogic models of Oxford dons like Benjamin Jowett, the texts of Plato were celebrated as sources of intellectual transcendentalism. Furthermore, Plato's texts, particularly the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus,* were appropriated as authoritative and irrefutable evidence of the virtues of homosocial relationships. Indeed, the intense homosociality of the Oxford tutorial system and the ethos of a wholly male residential society were seen to reflect the idealized atmosphere of ancient Athens. Of course, other scholars, like Pater and Symonds, found Plato's work to be stimulating to an entirely different degree.

As highly educated middle-class women, Bradley and Cooper were not unaware of the male-dominated university system and they knew the texts of Plato well. Thus, when Bellerophôn states that he 'so yearned/ For love—another love and innocent,/That should ennoble me as this defiled—,' Bradley and Cooper seem to be echoing/parodying the homosocial teachings of the Greek philosophers. In contrast to his earlier declarations, Bellerophôn longs for human companionship and not the sterile love of the divine (female) Athena:

> Blow fresh! How simply it is born in me
> To worship what is lovely, and efface
> To the pyre-ashes of its corpse whate'er
> Soils and corrupts or the fair earth or man.
> Had I but knowledge of one human soul
> Unalterably pure, that were a dart
> That through Chimaira's scaly bucklered side
> Would pass direct as arrow through the air…
> …Companionship
> I need with an imperishable strength;
> Not hers
>
> (I, iv)

It would seem that Bellerophôn's martial male subjectivity can only be asserted through the non-corrupting influence of same-sex love; a love which is 'not hers.' In fact,

Bellerophôn describes his 'pure' companion, in terms of phallic symbolism; he is to be a dart which will kill off the threat of female sexuality, as represented by the Chimaera. We might, therefore, interpret Bellerophôn's yearnings for an ennobling companionship in terms of Platonic philosophy. Indeed, in *Studies of the Greek Poets* (1873, 1876), John Addington Symonds advanced the Greek ideal of love between comrades as a guide to moral conduct. The Greek pederasts of Symonds, and Pater, are lovers, fighters, citizens, philosophers and pedagogues; comrades in virtue, philosophy and in arms, with little need for women.[41]

It is therefore not surprising that we can detect yet another dynamic at play in *Bellerophôn.* When, in a final desperate attempt to win the unyielding youth, Anteia likens her desire for Bellerophôn to the same-sex proclivities of Zeus: 'All that I feel for thee, and sinned, to bear/ A boy Zeus might blush for,' Anteia not only suggests the divine nature of her lust but also indicates that Bellerophôn will not be swayed by protestations of heterosexual desire. The reference to Ganymede, the beautiful young male cupbearer of Zeus, is highly suggestive of a homosexual context; a context of which many Victorians will have been well aware.[42] Bellerophôn's subsequent heavy-handed declaration of (hetero)sexual virility appears disingenuous in light of Anteia's comments: 'Thou art most beauteous; I am born a Greek/ And cannot look upon thee without change/ Of current in my blood.' Bellerophôn doth protest too much. In late-Victorian England, 'Greek desire' was not a euphemism for heterosexual passion, but for same-sex love.

Bradley and Cooper reward Bellerophôn for his homosocial tendencies with the introduction of Polubios. Polubios, a seer from Corinth, acts as Bellerophôn's companion and moral guide through his trials. Yet, the educative presence of Polubios is not enough to save Bellerophôn from himself. Athena's gift to Bellerophôn of a magic girdle allows him to tame the winged-horse Pĕgasos. On the graceful steed Bellerophôn defeats the Chimaera and slays his enemies. But his victories are hollow, as they have not been achieved unaided. In becoming the temporary master of Pĕgasos, Bellerophôn believes that he has been rewarded for rejecting *eros.* Yet, his fervent narcissism indicates that

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[41] See Dowling's *Hellenism and Homosexuality* for a more thorough discussion of Symonds' Hellenism.
[42] For a discussion of classical young male figures as 'homosexual' icons see Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-De-Siècle Culture* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

self-control is not an aspect of Bellerophôn's personality. Consequently, Bellerophôn is a failure in terms of heroic masculinity as he lacks self-control and self-knowledge. He is a Greek without *virtus*.

In contrast, Athena's gift of the magic bridle highlights her divine powers of restraint and control. Bellerophôn simply does not have, literally or metaphorically, the same capabilities as his goddess. Despite his vain attempts to avoid effeminacy, Bellerophôn is, therefore, emasculated by Athena. It would appear that, for Bradley and Cooper, behind every man there is an even greater goddess. As a result, we can see Bradley and Cooper taking aim at the patriarchal, Christian values so sacred to the Victorian middle-classes.

Athena is the first of a long line of powerful female figures in positions of religious, social and political dominance in *Bellerophôn*. For instance, when Bellerophôn is banished to Lykia, at the behest of Anteia, he becomes the (sexual) pawn between two Queens, Anteia and Erinna. Initially, the exchange of Bellerophôn between two female figures appears to represent a reversal of Sedgwick's homosocial triangle as delineated in her fascinating study *Between Men*.[43] However, Erinna's vice is not primarily sexual, but political. We are told that Erinna 'rules the army, council, Court, and town.' She is, in other words, a female tyrant. So, when she fears that she has been poisoned by the guiltless Bellerophôn, Erinna resolves to use the full force of her power:

> I am a woman: finer is my sense
> Of pain. If thou wouldst have fine punishment
> Leave it to me. Let him be straitly bound
> And thrown alive to the Chimaira's jaws
> He thought to break. That is my punishment.
> The way is long; so long will be the pain,
> Disgrace, despair.
>
> (II, iv)

Erinna unashamedly admits her tendency towards displacement: 'For when I suffer I must do some harm' (II, ii). But what is most interesting is that Erinna is in a position of power from which she can administer harm. Like Anteia, Erinna is a sadistic figure who is more than a match for her tyrannical spouse. Compared with both a Gorgon and an Amazon, Erinna represents female militancy.

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[43] See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

As Bram Dijkstra has ably shown in his sweeping study of art and culture in the late nineteenth century, *Idols of Perversity,* there was a distinct tendency to demonize women who threatened to attain social and political power. The figure of the Amazon had a particularly important role to play in the iconography of the Victorian 'battle of the sexes.' For instance, in his revealingly entitled study on human sexuality, *Satan in Society* (1870), Nicholas Cooke suggested that in pursuing 'Woman's Rights' women would 'become rapidly unsexed, and degraded from her present exalted position to the level of man, without his advantages; she will cease to be the gentle mother, and become the Amazonian brawler.'[44] Eventually, as Dijkstra observes, 'the theme of battling amazons was the turn of the century's favourite vehicle for the graphic delineation of that perpetual battle between the sexes whose principal function was to minimize the damaging inroads of viraginous females into the ever-threatened realm of male supremacy.'[45] The woman who pursued social and political power was therefore an uncultivated savage who threatened to usurp the social hierarchy by reversing traditional gender roles.

On a similar note, Eliza Lynn Linton's early polemic 'The Girl of the Period' (1868), suggested that the 'Girl of the Period does not please men' because she acts 'against nature' by being 'bold in bearing' and 'masculine in mind.'[46] Linton felt that this temporary madness would pass and that the proper balance between the sexes and the health of the body politic would be restored. Once again, the fear of social degeneracy is apparent in discussions of changing gender roles. As women who were prepared to change their own identities and enter into a male dominated profession using 'masculine' forms, no doubt Bradley and Cooper were particularly sensitive to Victorian discussions about the 'proper' roles of men and women. Consequently, we can see Anteia and Erinna as deliberately extreme parodies of nineteenth century popular conceptions of powerful and/or sexual women.

The idle gossip of Erinna's handmaidens reflects the Victorian social fear of the 'masculine' woman. Gorge comments that it is 'strange' that Erinna's husband still dotes on the gender-bending queen. Moreover, Erinna's thirst for power is explained away in

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[44] Nicholas Cooke, *Satan in Society* (Cincinnati; New York: C.F. Vent, 1871), p.86. Also partially cited in Dijkstra, p.65.

[45] Dijkstra, p.214. Dijkstra cites two striking images as representative of the Amazonian trend; the 'Battle of the Amazons' (1879) by Wilhlem Trübner and Max Beckman's 'Battle of the Amazons' (1911).

terms of magic. Supposedly, Erinna was the recipient of a charm which caused her waist to be encircled by 'cold snakes, that ever since/ Their impress girds her body, and makes chill/ The heart within her; so they say' (II, iv). The cold, phallic snakes are not only supposed to symbolize the death of Erinna's femininity, but they also represent her Medusa-like power to challenge male authority.

For many male artists and writers of the late nineteenth century, the lure of the serpentine woman was too much to resist. Like the Amazon, the link between the repeated image of the dangerous, serpentine woman and women's drive for sexual equality was unambiguous, as Bram Dijkstra explains:

> The link between Lamia and the late nineteenth-century feminists, the viragoes—the wild women—would have been clear to any intellectual reasonably well versed in classical mythology, since the Lamia of myth was thought to have been bisexual, masculinized, cradle-robbing creature, and therefore to the men of the turn of the century perfectly representative of the New Woman who, in their eyes, was seeking to arrogate to herself male privileges, refused the duty of motherhood, and was intent upon destroying the heavenly harmony of feminine subordination within the family.[47]

Erinna is a transgressive figure precisely because she refuses to conform to bourgeois notions of femininity and heterosexuality. Importantly, Erinna feels that she must reject *eros*, in order to act freely. However, Erinna's attempts to sublimate the forces of *eros* have left her sick. She describes her barely repressed desire as 'that deep grinding wound/ That gives me pangs so uncontrollable/ Ofttimes I shroud in feigned lethargy' (II, ii). We are left to wonder, in those moments of feigned lethargy, how Erinna satisfies her uncontrollable pangs.

Yet, the exact nature of her desire is open to question. According to the ancient writer Eustathius, Erinna was the name of a young poetess who was born of the island of Lesbos. She was a friend of Sappho and she died at the young age of nineteen, unmarried. The undertones of same-sex desire are not hard to miss. Bradley and Cooper's Erinna is married to Iobates, but she harbours a 'mysterious' passion. Significantly, the

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[46] Eliza Lynn Linton, 'The Girl of the Period,' *Saturday Review* (14 March, 1868), 339-40.

[47] See Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, p.309. It is also worth noting that in the earliest stages of European history, the serpent signified the ancient figure of primal earth and of woman as earth mother. But following Freud's famous reading of the Gorgon, the serpentine woman would, more often than not, come to symbolize male sexual anxiety and the fear of castration. Then, in the 1970s, the figure of the Gorgon, the ultimate serpentine woman, was re-claimed as a feminist figure of rage.

androgynous figure of Bellerophôn sets her passion aflame as his 'lithe shapely limbs/ And beamy temples' remind her of someone else. Vicinus suggests that the figure of the androgynous young man could signify the 'refusal of heterosexuality.'[48] The 'shapely limbs' that Anteia dwells upon do not appear to be especially masculine. But, she says, in response to her abstract musings, Artemis 'brought fury on him.' This sudden and indeterminate allusion may be a reference to the myth of Actaeon, in which Artemis killed the young man for spying on her naked in the bath. If so, the allusion may suggest that Erinna's secret longing is for a beautiful woman, but she fears that her desire will destroy her:

> Oh, how I dread the dark companionship
> Of the fell thing that gripes me! Is there hope
> Anteia errs not, saying the rare drug
> She send me will have power to put to sleep
> My wakeful soul's mysterious misery?
> Why, I can drink it, and then lie and brood
> How best to spoil the young Bellerophôn;
> For when I suffer I must do some harm. (II, ii)

As with Bellerophôn, *eros* causes a deep sense of anxiety and unease in Erinna. The frustrations of Erinna's unfulfilled sexual desires are channeled into ever more brutal acts against the young prince. As Martha Vicinus points out, 'gay texts more openly equate death and violence with the forbidden.'[49] Consequently, Bradley and Cooper demonstrate that there is little to be gained by refusing *eros,* other than pain and violence.

The seemingly comical interlude of a Maenad appearing in Iobates' Court is another episode dominated by a fierce female character. The intrusive inclusion of the character Phêmê not only demonstrates Bradley and Cooper's early fascination with the figure of the maenad, but also their deep appreciation of Euripides' *Bacchae.* Indeed, the multiple allusions to the *Hippolytus* and the *Bacchae,* suggests that Bradley and Cooper had a particular liking for Euripides' female characters.

In Greek mythology Pheme was a daughter of Gaia, known as the personification of fame and renown.[50] However, in Bradley and Copper's drama, Phêmê not only fulfils her role as a gossip but also declares herself to be the daughter of Dionysus. She

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[48] Vicinus, 'The Adolescent Boy,' p.90.
[49] Vicinus, 'The Adolescent Boy,' p.88.
[50] Pheme is the anglicized version of the original Greek. Again, Michael Field prefers the heavily accented version of the original Greek.

describes her own conception as violent and 'perilous,' indicating the fierce coupling of a mortal and god: 'perilous/ The nuptials, doubly perilous the birth/ That crowns them— I that child omnipotent' (III, vi). In her dual role as rumor monger and maenad, a self-confident Phêmê appears before the king and queen to announce Bellerophôn's success in killing the Chimaera. And, like Dionysus' announcement to Pentheus in the *Bacchae*, she also declares her usurpation of Iobates' kingdom:

> Most curious monarch, as a Bacchanal
> I've roamed the city: all thy people know
> That which thou knowest not, retired so far
> From the great throng now wholly subjugate
> To my wild will; thy kingdom is my own,
> And now I dare to stand before thy throne
> And blow my trumpet in thy face, O King! (III, vi)

According to Phêmê, Lykia is in the grip of a Dionysiac revolution. Erinna can scarcely believe that the throne is under threat from another powerful woman and so she asks Phêmê, 'Art thou a woman, vast and awful shape?' Phêmê's saucy reply is unequivocal and revealing:

> Ay, Queen, a woman; seest thou not my breasts?
> And, strange to tell, the only woman I
> Who loves my sex, and counts it not as cheap
> Beside the stronger. Woman are to me
> Trumpets of flesh: I am their prophet, seer;
> I love them as a king his courtiers loves.
> I fill their ears, I tip their tongues; — O Queen,
> I love them more than a miser loves his gold. (III, vi)

In Phêmê's hands, the Dionysiac revolution will not be a violent insurrection, as Phêmê's revolutionary strategy seems to involve the widespread seduction of the women of Lykia. In stark contrast to the violent activities of male 'heroes', Phêmê intends to transform the social and political landscape by promoting loving relationships between women. Indeed, Bradley and Cooper are keen to emphasize the importance of same-sex relationships to Greek social and religious systems. Heterosexual relationships, on the other hand, as represented by Erinna and Iobates, are shown to be infertile and loveless. Importantly, all of the *mortal* women in this drama are childless; there are no family units to defend or uphold. Nonetheless, Phêmê's hedonistic revolutionary strategy threatens to throw the social and political hierarchy of Lykia into disarray.

In response to her provocative speech, Iobates resolves to punish Phêmê for her verbal outburst. The impotent king announces to the Court that he will sew her 'revolting lips/ As gaping wounds together.' This brutal act will not only silence Phêmê and prevent her from speaking her powerful (political) rhetoric; the stitching of her lips is also an act of sexual violence. The lips with which she speaks with such passion, the lips with which Phêmê gives and receives pleasure, are to be controlled by a male tyrant. In the face of such torture Phêmê remains resolute. As a woman who loves other women, Phêmê reveals that she is no stranger to persecution and prison. Phêmê's is in fact acutely aware of her power to disturb and distress patriarchs:

> I will outwit thee, vex thee, and forestall,
> Harass thy slumber, fret thy waking hours,
> Even undermine thy kingdom, while I lie
> A bound corpse in thy dungeon. For the rest— (III, vi)

Unfortunately, we never learn what 'the rest' is as Phêmê is conveniently smuggled off toward the dungeon. Presumably, Phêmê will make a miraculous escape, much like Dionysus in the *Bacchae*. Or else, Phêmê really is to be tortured and imprisoned. If so, Bradley and Cooper's violent punishment of the maenad is problematic and suggests that Phêmê is not intended to be seen as a 'heroic,' proto-feminist figure. If, as Angela Leighton suggests, Michael Field's celebration of pleasure is 'more emancipating than decadent, more active than introspective,' then the torture and imprisonment of the only character that expresses her thoughts and desires freely seems rather damning.[51] Forcibly silenced, Phêmê will have no choice but to consider the failure of her 'liberatory' religion and lifestyle, in the face of such tyranny. Alternatively, Phêmê can be seen as the true 'hero' of the drama, as she is willing to express her sexual desires honestly and straightforwardly. Indeed, Bradley and Cooper position the maenad as a positive, actively desiring female figure. Phêmê may yet succeed in undermining Iobates' kingdom from the womb-like depths of her dungeon.

When Phêmê is relegated to the deep cells of the palace, her movement imitates the plunge of the water nymph Eurunomê into the depths of the fountain of Pirênê. Both women descend into the body of Mother Earth, where they can commune with the power of Nature. Indeed, throughout *Bellerophôn* we are given reminders that there is a

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[51] Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, p.214.

profound female presence, which underpins the drama: 'there is a buried motherhood/ Deep at the sobbing heart of these bright springs' (IV, viii). The female condition, as represented by Demeter, is one of woe and rage. But, as Eurunomê points out, this knowledge is buried deep. In order to explain the pain of losing Pĕgasos, Eurunomê recounts the story of Demeter and Persephone.

Persephone, Demeter's daughter by her brother Zeus, was abducted by Hades and taken to his realm of the Underworld. Less powerful than Demeter, Hades only managed to achieve this audacious feat with the help of Zeus. In her wrath, Demeter caused the Earth to become barren so that mankind was threatened with destruction by famine. Eventually, Persephone was returned to her mother, but only after Hades tricked her into eating pomegranate seeds. Having eaten the fruit of the dead, Persephone is forced to return to the Underworld, to her abductor Hades, every year. Thus, every year, vegetation and agriculture, over which Demeter is goddess, dies away symbolizing the mother's grief at losing her daughter.

The myth can be seen to represent not only the importance of the mother-daughter bond as the axis, but also the triumph of pagan joy over death, of female solidarity over male sexual violence. Persephone need not be seen as the empty object of patriarchal exchange, nor as a passive sacrificial victim. In fact Demeter not only forces Zeus to recognize the pain of her loss, she also forces the Olympian King to recognize her power. However, Eurunomê's allusion to the myth emphasizes her suffering and the continual suffering of Demeter, 'To other arms I go… To swell the torrent-anguish of her love/ Who has lost children—' (IV, viii). There is female solidarity here, but there is also a profound sense of injury and alienation. Proserpine was, of course, a favourite subject for both Swinburne and Rossetti. But for Bradley and Cooper the myth of Demeter and Persephone is a forceful reminder of the dark side of *eros* and the perils of heterosexual desire. Furthermore, the inclusion of the myth highlights the barrenness and sterility of the mortal figures of Bradley and Cooper's drama.

Another female character who suffers as a result of *eros* is, of course, Anteia. It should be noted that unlike many male characters from Greek myth, Anteia never resorts to rape or sexual assault despite the all-consuming nature of her lust. Instead, after failing to secure Bellerophôn's love and death, Anteia's unfulfilled desire, literally, kills her. Like her Euripidean counterpart, Phaedra, Anteia takes her own life. Significantly

however, Anteia dies, not through hanging, as in Euripides's *Hippoloytus*, but by a poisoned wedding girdle. In an explicitly sexual scene, the snake-encrusted girdle poisons the fated Queen through her sexual organs; it strangulates her desire. Whereas Erinna's illusory girdle of snakes signified her power and 'masculinity,' Anteia's girdle reflects her subordination in terms of conventional heterosexual relations. Anteia is woman who is ruined by her passion, as the phallic girdle destroys the (heterosexual) female subject. In the end, the ever-manipulative Anteia kills herself, in order to move Bellerophôn to 'a remorseful pity of thyself.' Anteia's final heroic act demonstrates that spurning *eros* and denying desiring women sexual pleasure is a grave mistake.

The sexual education of Bellerophôn comes at a very high cost to the female protagonist. Anteia takes her own life, not as an act of honour as in the *Hippolytus*, but because it is the only means by which she is able to punish Bellerophôn for his piety. Bellerophôn has his female sacrifice; he is no longer a *parthenos*, but a fully-fledged hero. In true epic tradition, the death of the female protagonist allows a re-assessment of the dramatic situation. On learning of Anteia's sacrifice, Bellerophôn yields his high ideals in the realization that *eros* is life-affirming and, consequently, virtuous:

> Thou art free
> Of life, I of religion;-- oh, to feast,
> To banquet on thy love! That revelry
> I have denied my heart; its vineyard slopes
> Lie sunken in deep snow; thaw the false crust
> And crimson the grape-clusters! (IV, vi)

Bellerophôn's association of love, lust and life with the vineyards of Dionysus reveals the commonality between Dionysus and Aphrodite. Indeed, as Zeitlin explains, both deities are united in their ability to unleash passionate forces in unsuspecting mortals:

> Aphrodite, like Dionysus in the *Bacchae*, demands recognition as a divinity. She too insists that mortals recognize the alien power of passionate forces in the world as also intrinsically one's own. But Dionysus' mode of expression is collective: the *thiasos* and initiation into cultic mysteries bind worshippers to each other and to their god and loosen them from the ordinary restrictions of daily life. Aphrodite's desire is directed rather to the mysteries of sexuality and marriage whereby one self is bound to another and the bride first binds on and then unbinds the girdle of her virginity.[52]

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[52] Froma I. Zeitlin, 'The Power of Aphrodite,' p.61

Ironically, Bellerophôn dies in the role that Anteia had designed for him, that of her devoted lover. In death, Bellerophôn and Anteia are finally united. But they are united in unrequited passion, as Anteia's girdle remains bound. Ultimately, Bellerophôn is punished for his faith in an inhumane and sterile religion and he dies a pitiful death, unfulfilled and unheralded. In *Bellerophôn* Bradley and Cooper demonstrate that self-renunciation is mere hubris. And, ultimately, it is hubris which destroys Bellerophôn.

However, the myth of Bellerophôn is an unnecessarily cumbersome vehicle through which to examine sexual morality. If Bradley and Cooper wished to celebrate sexual freedom, then very few characters in *Bellerophôn* are allowed the privilege. And, whilst Bradley and Cooper's disjointed representation of the myth is indicative of their inter-textual approach, the plurality of references in *Bellerophôn* suggests that Katharine and Edith were perhaps too keen to display their knowledge of classical texts and their affinity with contemporary literature. Nevertheless, this verse-drama is both innovative and daring. Indeed, in their experimental use of the dramatic form Bradley and Cooper can be situated alongside other nineteenth century female writers such as Joanna Baillie, Fanny Kemble, Augusta Webster and George Eliot, as well as Byron, Shelley, Browning and Swinburne. Further, Bradley and Cooper's bold use of form reflects their transgressive subject.

Building on the work of Shelley, Swinburne and others Bradley and Cooper suggest that when traditional social and political notions of morality inhibit loving relationships, then social and/or psychic violence ensues. We might, therefore, consider *Bellerophôn* as an antidote to the pious religiosity of writers like Coventry Patmore. In *The Unknown Eros,* Patmore conceives of earthly love as a presentiment of sexual ecstasy in heaven. In Bradley and Cooper's vision, experiencing sexual ecstasy on earth is in itself virtuous. *Eros* is, after all, divinely inspired and the fulfillment of *eros* should not be prohibited or regulated by *man*-made laws. The obvious beneficiaries of such a liberal interpretation of *eros* would be women and those whose desire is regulated by the state and social convention. Despite its flaws, *Bellerophôn* should not only be considered as a provocative example of Victorian sexual dissidence, but also as the beginning of a transgressive 'Dionysiac' creed that would be more successfully elucidated in *Callirhoë*.

'I am a maenad, I must have love's wine': Sexual and Spiritual Liberation in Michael Field's *Callirhoë*

In 1882, before the strategic adoption of the male pseudonym, Katharine Bradley made a remarkable announcement. In a letter to her cousin's family, Katharine boldly declared: 'the Persian [Edith] and I are now Maenads with "a longing for the hills & ecstasy."' The conversion was, apparently, not just ethereal. Katharine teased, 'let [Frances] expect to see me at the midland station with cone-pointed thyrsos & fawn-skin. Tell him I shall walk to Lindelhurst in this array. He need not think of hiding my originality in a fly!'[1] The Dionysiac strain that was evident in *Bellerophôn* had now become doctrine. It was, therefore, as self-professed daughters of Dionysus that Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper began their second Hellenic drama, *Callirhoë.* But, with the critical failure of *Bellerophôn* still fresh in their minds, the Maenads were in need of converts. Curiously enough, Bradley and Cooper looked to the rather sober figure of Robert Browning. When, unsolicited, Edith sent *Callirhoë* to Browning she described it as 'the first-fruits of thought spent by a new labourer on the vineyard of human life.' If Browning would only 'taste the fruit' then the drama 'will not have been grown in vain.'[2] Browning duly tasted and was hooked. He thought the volume 'brimful of beauty'; the work of 'indubitable poetic genius.'[3] With *Callirhoë,* Michael Field, the poet of the vine, had finally made his mark.

In this play Callirhoë becomes the hero of a drama in which, on the surface, the primary concern is the arrival of the cult of Dionysus to the secluded region of Calydon in ancient Greece. The coming of Dionysus signifies a moment of cultural rupture, which severely disturbs the social order of Calydon, exposing the fragile and deeply gendered relationship between the citizens and the polity. The central conflict of the play focuses on the violent struggle between the forces of unrestrained sexual passion, exemplified in the text by Coresus, the male Priest of Dionysus, and the unyielding chastity of the fair maiden, Callirhoë. Coresus attempts to seduce the 'chaste' Callirhoë into becoming a

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[1] Katharine's letter to Frances Brooks is contained in Manuscript at the Bodleian Library, BLO Ms. Eng. Lett.d.405 (1867-87), dated 1882.
[2] Letter from Edith Cooper to Robert Browning, dated May 7th 1884, Add. Mss. 46866-46867.
[3] Letter from Robert Browning to Edith Cooper, dated May 28th 1884, Add. Ms 46866-46867.

maenad by declaring his love for her. Ultimately, however, Coresus' passion for Callirhoë leads him to sacrifice himself, in her place, thereby leaving the young maiden, suddenly persuaded by the intensity of her dead lover's desire, to declare herself a maenad. The story of the erotic transformation of a virtuous virgin bears a striking resemblance to the plot of *Bellerophôn.* However, with a female protagonist, the significance of Callirhoë's dramatic conversion is radically altered. If *Bellerophôn* highlights the social and religious prohibitions to sexual fulfillment, then *Callirhoë* emphasizes the transformative power of erotic liberation. In the struggle between irrational desire and asceticism, the dark side of Greek desire triumphs.

Callirhoë's transformation, from maiden to maenad, is not just an exemplary personal journey. As Maenads, the profane desires of Greek maidens are given precedence and sacred status. The women's worship of the liminal god unravels the social and religious fabric that contains and defines female behaviour. The religion of Dionysus exposes the fragility and instability of gender categories, disturbing conventional models of social organization. The worship of Dionysus also liberates sexual desire from established categories. Sexuality in *Callirhoë* is therefore polychromatic, sometimes violent and subject to wide variation. The veneration of pleasure can be seen to reach its apex in the orgiastic religion of Dionysus and, in becoming a maenad, Callirhoë is transformed, along with her community, by the power of sexual freedom and passion. However, not all of the characters enjoy liberation from traditional social roles and conventions. Those characters who benefit from the male-dominated social system suffer greatly when the system collapses. In such cases, erotic, psychic and physical freedom causes distress and suffering. Bradley and Cooper are consequently able to emphasize the social and political benefits of Maenadism *for women,* whilst exposing the inequities in social power relations.

In *Callirhoë,* Bradley and Cooper can be seen to, once again, respond to the calls of early nineteenth century hedonists like Shelley and Byron for a revolutionary 'religion' of pleasure. The epigraph to Field's closet drama is a quotation from Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* 'to make the heart a spirit' (*Canto* III, 103). And, like Byron's pilgrim who comes to appreciate the (re)vitalizing power of love, Callirhoë finds love and spiritual fulfillment at the very moment when she is threatened with destruction. On a similar note, the play is also prefaced with a quotation from Shelley's 'Prince Athanase.'

Plate II, Jean Honoré Fragonard, *Corésus se sacrifice pour sauver Callirhoé* (1765)

The Preface to *Callirhoë* states that 'there is nothing lovelier among natural things than a bunch of grapes, a Bacchanalian cluster of rare crimson.' For Michael Field, the union of natural object and human affection find their harmony in Shelley's poetic metaphor, which Bradley and Cooper quote:

> Thou art the wine whose drunkenness is all
> We can desire, O Love! And happy souls
> Ere from thy vine the leaves of autumn fall,
>
> Catch thee, and feed from their o'erflowing bowls
> Thousands who thirst for thy ambrosial dew.

Callirhoë is likewise addressed to the 'thousands' who thirst for the liberatory ambrosia of Dionysus. After all, 'the myth of Dionysus is the glorification of enthusiasm, which the poet believes to be the sap of the Tree of Life, the spring and origin of all good fruit.' If enthusiasm is the origin of all good poetry, then there is also 'nothing lovelier among human things than Love with its halo of self-sacrifice.' Bradley and Cooper take the theme of self-sacrifice literally. Indeed, the self-immolation of Callirhoë and Coresus not only emphasizes the dark side of Greek religion, but also the dark side of irrational sexual desire.

The Preface to *Callirhoë* also tells us that 'the story of Callirhoë is drawn from a classic source, but has never been raised from obscurity by ancient bard or dramatist.' The myth of Callirhoë had been raised from obscurity by the great French artist Jean-Honoré Fragonard. In 1765, Fragonard produced one of the most highly regarded paintings of the mid-eighteenth century entitled, *Corésus se sacrifice pour sauver Callirhoé* (Plate II). Having established Fragonard's reputation within the French Academy, the painting was removed to the Louvre in Paris. It is entirely feasible that Katharine Bradley encountered this painting whilst living and studying in Paris at the Collège de France. However, Bradley makes no mention of Fragonard in her unusually frank record of the exact circumstances of the inception of *Callirhoë:*

> The story of Callirhoë was drawn from this source & under these circumstances. We left fresh faced for Stoke Bishop in the autumn of 1879. Edith & I plunged into college life. In the spring of 1880 I got over-worked; became ill, discontinued all college work; on recovery went to London to hear Ruskin lecture; & while there feeble & in much mental despair came across this passage…Coresus, priest

> of Bacchus at Calydon, loved the maiden Callirhoë in vain. Bacchus indignant at his servant's repulse sent madness & death on Calydon. The oracle of Dodona announced that Coresus must sacrifice Callirhoë, or some one who would die for her. No one was willing to die for her, & she stood up beside the altar to be slain. But when Coresus looked on her his love overcame his anger, & he slew himself in her stead. Then her heart turned to him and beside the fountain to which her name was given she died of her own hand, and followed him to the underworld.[4]

The source for *Callirhoë* was a passage in Frederick William Henry Myers' *Hellenica: Greek Oracles* (1880).

The classic literary source for Callirhoë is recorded by the ancient Greek author Pausanias in his *Description of Greece* (7.21.1). Bradley and Cooper remain largely faithful to the myth as recorded by Pausanias and re-told by Myers, yet the two renderings depart from each other over the impact of the religion of Dionysus on the citizens of Calydon.[5] In the myth as told by Pausanias, Dionysus is firmly established as the local deity in Calydon. It is from this position of power that Dionysus claims his retribution. In *Callirhoë,* on the other hand, Dionysus and his priest enjoy only limited influence until the city suffers from a nameless plague. As a result, Bradley and Cooper are able to emphasize the Calydonians' conversion to the religion of Dionysus and the subsequent collapse of the existing socio-political system. Michael Field's emphasis on the spiritual transformation of the Calydonians and the collapse of traditional patriarchal structures is highly reflective of the seductive and destructive attributes of Dionysus in Euripides's *Bacchae*.[6]

Myers' extensive collection of Hellenic myths was not the only inspiration for Michael Field's first Greek play. Bradley reveals that the glowing words of Professor Alfred Marshall, Principal of Bristol University College, also influenced the development of *Callirhoë.* If the enthusiasm of Professor Marshall could be detected in the words of Coresus, the growing influence of Edith was certainly detectable in the final cut:

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[4] Annotated copy of *Callirhoë* held by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS.Eng.poet.e.70.

[5] It is also possible that Bradley and Cooper were influenced by Chariton's ancient novel, *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, which begins 'Eros loves strife and paradoxical outcomes' (1:1).

[6] The arrival of the Thracian god Dionysus in the lands of Greece was treated by a variety of ancient playwrights in a number of tragedies. Aeschylus, for instance, elected to deal with significance of Dionysiac religion in his works, specifically in *Lycurgus, Semele, Xantriae, Pentheus* and ending with a Satyr play, *The Nurses of Dionysus*. But it is Euripides' depiction of the subversive wine-god that remains the most memorable.

> It was I think in the spring of 1881— after my return from London that I read Sandys' *Bacchae* with Mr Gridlestone & made large use of his exquisite translations of single passages or lines. The illustrations were of inestimable value to me. Roughly speaking as far as I remember the play was finished in 1881— before summer holidays. In 1882 the sacrifice scene was re-cast, & hundreds of lines lopped from my too luxuriant passages by the inexorable Edith.

Following the publication of Callirhoë, the inexorable Edith revealed to their ardent supporter Browning that it was her aunt who 'was the enthusiastic student of the *Bacchae*' and the primary author of *Callirhoë.*[7] Obviously, Katharine was also an enthusiastic reader of John Edwin Sandys's *The Bacchae of Euripides, with critical and explanatory notes and with numerous illustrations from works of ancient art* (1880). Sandys' critical edition of Euripides' play was hugely popular, running into many editions. His approach to the subject also marked something of a turning point in renditions of Euripides' play. Like *Medea,* the Bacchae had been a subject for burlesque in the 1860s. For example, Vincent Amcott produced *Pentheus: A Burlesque in Three Acts* in 1866. But from the 1870s onwards, following Nietzsche's dramatic intervention, Euripides was increasingly considered as worthy of scholarly study.

Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* (1872) brilliantly re-defined the significance of Dionysus for a modern audience:

> Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man…Now the slave is a free man; now the rigid, hostile barriers that necessity, caprice, or "impudent convention" have fixed between man and man are broken. Now, with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, and fused with his neighbour, but as one with him, as if the veil of *māyā* had been torn aside and now were merely fluttering in tatters before the mysterious primordial unity.[8]

Heinrichs suggests that Nietzsche changed the nature of Dionysus from 'the pedestrian vegetation and fertility god constructed in the course of the nineteenth century,' to 'the modern understanding of Dionysus as a cluster of psychological and social abstractions.'[9]

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[7] Letter to Robert Browning, 29th May 1884, is reprinted in *Works and Days*, p.3.
[8] Nietzsche, *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, p.37.
[9] See Albert Heinrichs's article, "He has a God in Him": Human and Divine in the Modern Perceptions of Dionysus' in *Masks of Dionysus*, eds. Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Farone (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp.13-43.

Indeed, for Nietzsche, Dionysus was not merely a profoundly significant chthonic god, but the hero of the tragic stage: 'the tradition is undisputed that Greek tragedy in its earliest form had for its sole theme the sufferings of Dionysus and that for a long time the only stage hero was Dionysus himself.'[10]

However, Nietzsche felt that Greek tragedy was effectively destroyed by the philosophical musings of Euripides and Socrates: 'Dionysus had already been scared from the tragic stage, by a demonic power speaking through Euripides. Even Euripides was, in a sense, only a mask: the deity that spoke through him was neither Dionysus nor Apollo, but an altogether new born demon, called *Socrates*.'[11] In other words, Nietzsche suggested that Euripides killed (Aeschylean) tragedy by applying the principles of Socratic rationalism to his art: 'optimistic dialectic drives *music* out of tragedy with the scourge of its syllogisms; that is, it destroys the essence of tragedy, which can be interpreted only as a manifestation and projection into images of Dionysian states.'[12] For Nietzsche, one cannot *think* one's way through tragedy; one must emotionally respond to it.

Charles Segal points out that, 'what is missing from Nietzsche's discussion, otherwise fruitful for the study of the *Bacchae*, is a consideration of the feminine in relation to both Dionysus and Apollo.'[13] This is a significant point as in ancient Greece, as in Victorian England, irrationality was seen as a predominantly 'feminine' characteristic. Consequently, it can be seen that to adopt 'irrationality' as a philosophical standpoint is to address moral, aesthetic and philosophical questions from a predominantly marginalized (read female) perspective. From an 'irrational' standpoint one is able to re-imagine society and women's roles within a re-organized society. Nietzsche's vision of Dionysian irrationality was effectively limited by his deeply sexist attitudes and beliefs in aristocratic political principles. Nevertheless, his work was appropriated by feminists and political activists in the 1890s.[14]

Bradley and Cooper employ Myers' account of *Callirhoë* as a frame narrative, through which they then explore the personal, social and political potential of Dionysian emotionalism, from a decidedly 'feminine' perspective. Bradley and Cooper effectively

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[10] Nietzsche, p.73.
[11] Nietzsche, p.82.
[12] Nietzsche, p.92.
[13] Charles Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*, p.158.

compel their audience to consider the moral, aesthetic and philosophical questions raised by the conversion of the Calydonians to the irrational religion of Dionysus. Yet, in their celebration of Dionysus and their reverence of 'enthusiasm' in particular, Bradley and Cooper have been seen to emulate the work of the eminent Victorian scholar Walter Pater. In his controversial volume *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), Pater espoused a determinedly liberal, eroticized Hellenism. Later, in 'A Study of Dionysus' (1876), Pater celebrated the erotic and spiritual aspects of Dionysus.

In recent years Pater has been lauded, by critics like Kathy Psomiades and Ruth Vanita, for his influential and 'inclusive' liberal aestheticism.[15] According to both Yopie Prins and Richard Dellamora, Pater's aesthetic essays 'circulated beyond male circles and within the context of the Victorian "Woman Question" to create an aesthetic minoritizing discourse among women readers as well.'[16] Prins suggests that one reason for Pater's affinity with women writers is that he 'performs the conversion of Classical learning into a queer philology that appealed to women interested in turning Greek eros to their own purposes.'[17] However, as Linda Dowling suggests, Pater's liberal observations are 'unintelligible unless viewed within the context of a Socratic eros of men loving men in spiritual procreancy.'[18] In other words, Pater's liberal Hellenism has a specifically homosocial and homoerotic context. As we have seen, Bradley and Cooper were interested and engaged in exploring the social and political implications of *eros,* from a predominantly, but not exclusively, female perspective.

Without doubt, Pater's Hellenic aestheticism was highly influential in the late Victorian period and his writing certainly enjoyed a wide appeal. Whilst Bradley and Cooper admired Pater, Pater's Hellenism and his depiction of Dionysus in particular often seems anaemic and androcentric in comparison with Bradley and Cooper's Bacchic vision. For example, in 'A Study of Dionysus' (1876), Pater describes the Greek god as 'the spirit of fire and dew.' But Pater's Dionysus appears to be soaked with dew rather than galvanized by fire. Pater depicts a diluted Dionysus, drained from vitality and the crimson of his own Bacchanalian clusters:

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[14] See Paul Patton's introduction to *Nietzsche, Feminism and Political Theory*, p.vii.
[15] See the articles by both Psomiades and Yopie Prins in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* and Ruth Vanita's *Sappho and the Virgin Mary: Same-Sex Love and the English Literary Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
[16] Prins, 'Greek Maenads, Victorian Spinsters,' p.54.
[17] Prins, 'Greek Maendas, Victorian Spinsters,' p.47

the religion of Dionysus connects itself, not with tree-worship only, but also with ancient water-worship, the worship of the *spiritual forms* of springs and streams…For not the heat only, but its solace—the *freshness* of the cup—this too was felt by those people of the vineyard, whom the prophet Melampus had taught to mix always their wine with water, and with whom the watering of the vines became a religious ceremony; the very dead, as they thought, drinking of and refreshed by the stream.[19]

In Pater's re-vision, Dionysus is a 'refreshing' god. He is not wildly, irrationally passionate, drunk on spiritual fulfillment. Pater's spiritual intoxication is not simply tempered by dew, it is diluted by water.

According to tradition, the diluted wine of Dionysus was supposed to have a civilizing influence, as Vernant explains:

> when diluted and consumed in accordance with the rules, it brings to civilized life an extra, as it were supernatural dimension: joy in the feast with evil forgotten. It is a drug (*pharmakon*) that makes pain fade away; it is the ornament, the crown, the living, happy brilliance of the banquet, the joy of the celebration.[20]

But, Vernant reminds us, wine is ambiguous. When Dionysian wine is consumed neat, 'it conceals a force of extreme wildness, a burning fire.'[21] There is nothing refined about genuine Dionysian intoxication.

Pater's Dionysus is unambiguously civilized. In his movement, from the hills of Boeotia to the city of Athens, Pater's Dionysus becomes the celebratory god of the *symposium*:

> To this stage of his town-life, that Dionysus of "enthusiasm" already belonged; it was to the Athenians of the town, to urbane young men, sitting together at the banquet, that those expressions of a sudden eloquence came, of those loosened utterance and finer speech, its colour and imagery.[22]

This urbane Bacchus barely has a pulse. Prins observes that the 'Maenadic enthusiasm' which Pater describes in his essay, 'is transferred to the Hellenic enthusiast, who is

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[18] Dowling, p.94.
[19] Walter Pater, *Greek Studies: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan & co., 1920), pp.27-28.
[20] Jean-Pierre Vernant & Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1990), p.399-400.
[21] Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, p.399.
[22] Pater, p.39.

explicitly addressed as male ("let him reflect") and implicitly identified with the urbane Athenians who recognize Dionysus as one of their own.'[23] In Pater's re-vision Dionysus is the god of an exclusively male-dominated *symposium* and not the god of a frenetic female-orientated religion. In other words, Dionysus and his maenads are re-defined by Pater in terms of an urbane androcentric aestheticism. The diluted wine of Pater's Dionysus is not strong enough to overthrow the values of the male dominated *polis*. 'Loosened utterance and finer speech' does not equate with a re-evaluation of social, political and religious structures, nor does it suggest the inclusion of a female perspective.

Pater praised the Greeks for their 'passionate coldness.' As Jenkyns points out, 'the noun and the epithet are equally important.'[24] Bradley and Cooper raised concerns about Pater's style. Because Pater's aestheticism was so 'very peculiar to himself,' his analysis erased the aesthetic experience of other spectators.[25] Furthermore, following a public lecture given by Pater in 1890, Edith mischievously recorded: 'how one would love to surprise the bacchant in Walter Pater!' One suspects that Edith would have surprised an urbane Athenian, rather than a bacchant.

In his second essay on Dionysus, 'The Bacchanals of Euripides' (1889), Pater's Bacchus again lacks the passionate excess of the wild god of the mountains.[26] Pater describes 'all the soothing influences' that Dionysus brings with him: 'above all, his gift of the medicine of sleep to weary mortals.'[27] Even the maenads, 'those who experience most directly the influence of things,' are barely recognizable: 'the presence of night, the expectation of morning, the nearness of the wild, unsophisticated, natural things—the echoes, the coolness, the noise of frightened creatures as they climbed through the darkness, the sun-rise from the hill-tops, the disillusion, the bitterness of satiety.'[28] Pater avoids describing the 'grotesque scene' in which Agave kills Pentheus, which is 'full of wild, coarse, revolting details, of course not without pathetic touches, and with the

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[23] Prins, 'Greek Maenads,' p.53.
[24] Jenkyns, *Victorians and Ancient Greece*, p.144.
[25] Quotation taken from Jill Ehnenn's article 'Looking Strategically: Feminist and Queer Aesthetics in Michael Field's *Sight and Song*,' *Victorian Poetry* 42:3 (2005), 213-260, (216).
[26] Pater wrote 'The Bacchanals of Euripides' in 1878, but the essay was not published until 1889. Consequently, it is highly unlikely that Pater's 'Bacchanals' influenced Michael Field's Hellenic dramas.
[27] Pater, 'The Bacchanals of Euripides' in *Greek Studies*, p.68.
[28] Pater, 'The Bacchanals of Euripides,' p.57.

loveliness of the serving Maenads—their trees and water—never quite forgotten.'[29] The maenads appear wistful rather than possessed by Bacchic 'madness.'

As Richard Jenkyns suggests:

> Pater took the *Bacchae*, a work of violent beauty and ferocious animation, and announced that the whole play was penetrated by a "sort of quiet wisdom." Even when he described the ecstasy of the maenads, he made it sound like the emotion of a don taking a walk in the country: "that giddy, intoxicating sense of spring—that tingling in the veins, sympathetic with the yearning life of the earth."[30]

Pater's subsumed and 'sympathetic' wine-god may be a transgressive figure combining masculine and feminine attributes, but he is not the same god or the driving force of *Callirhoë*. Pater's Dionysus has a tempered 'enthusiasm' but he lacks the fire of a true revolutionary. Katharine and Edith had to return to Euripides in order to recover the fire of Dionysus.

In an annotated copy of the play, in Katharine's hand, she reveals the real source of her inspiration:

> The intoxication of Nature gives inspiration from below. When the gods wd give us of their best & we crave it, they set the full cup of lyric frenzy to our lips & who dares drink of it goes mad. Madness is the initiatory right, the unlocking of the Doors of heaven. Would'st then know the secret of the hills? Animated by the wine-cup plunge into their glowing folds. Wine is the wild, mystic speech of Nature... What other life remains unsealed to us? There is the glorious life of the gods flooding the frenzied soul—the rich revelry of Nature is ours—what more is secret to us that we must take by violence? <u>Love is the frenzy that unfolds ourselves.</u>

Rather than urbane young Athenians, we turn to maenads and 'the secret of the hills.' Intoxicated by not only by wine, but by lust, the maenads plunge into the 'glowing folds' of the hills, where they may revel and freely explore their frenzied desires.

Much like *Bellerophon, Callirhoë* is a characteristically ambitious play by Michael Field that operates on a number of different textual levels and includes multiple allusions to classical Greek texts and contemporary literature. Euripides, Shelley and Pater can all be seen to have influenced Katharine and Edith's liberal Hellenism. I

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[29] Pater, 'The Bacchanals of Euripides,' p.76.
[30] Jenkyns, *Victorians and Ancient Greece*, p.108-109.

suggest that it is also possible to detect the influence of another highly contentious contemporary in Bradley and Cooper's Bacchic plot. That is the influence of 'the fairest first-born son of fire,' Algernon Charles Swinburne.[31]

There is a strongly subversive subtext to *Callirhoë* in which Michael Field can be seen to combine the sexualized Hellenism of Swinburne with the pleasure principles of Shelley and Pater. This aesthetic combination can be envisaged as a Dionysiac poetics of pleasure and pain.[32] There is more to Michael Field's debt than a close proximity of pleasure and pain however. In 1926, Harold Nicholson described Swinburne's poetry, which had suffered a prolonged critical backlash, as 'a flaming symbol of emancipation, the very wine of freedom, the zest of heresy, the whole music of passion.'[33] It is in this sense, the lyrical expression of an intense passion for life and liberty that Michael Field can be compared with Swinburne. If Swinburne was the 'libidinous laureate of a pack of satyrs,' then Bradley and Cooper were the lyrical maenads.[34]

Bradley and Cooper were great admirers of Swinburne; they considered him to be the best poet in England and a worthy successor for Poet Laureate. Swinburne exchanged letters with Bradley and Cooper and in a number of cases the poets treated the same literary subjects, including Mary Stuart, Sappho and Tristan de Leonois. Swinburne's influence on the next generation of poets has been noted by a number of critics including Dorothea Barrett.[35] In 1898, an anonymous contributor to the *Academy* stated that Swinburne was 'the most sedulously imitated of poets' for twenty years after the appearance of *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865).[36] A mere nineteen years after Swinburne produced *Atalanta*, Michael Field published *Callirhoë*.

Michael Field's first Greek drama shares the same intellectual and ideological drive as Swinburne's own first Greek tragedy. The setting of Bradley and Cooper's drama is the same as Swinburne's *Atalanta* and the heroines of both tragedies are dutiful

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[31] This description of Swinburne was coined by Edmund Gosse in *Portraits and Sketches* (London: Heinemann, 1912), p.47

[32] Julian Baird has identified what he calls the 'Pleasure-Pain paradox' in Swinburne's poetry, see 'Swinburne, Sade, and Blake: The Pleasure-Pain Paradox' in *Victorian Poetry* 9 (1971), pp.49-75.

[33] See Harold Nicholson's *Swinburne* (London: 1929, reprinted 1969), p.145.

[34] John Morley coined this rather wonderful description of Swinburne in his article, 'Review of Swinburne, Poems and Ballads,' *Saturday Review*, (August 4, 1866).

[35] Dorothea Barrett identifies a Swinburnian strain of sado-masochism in the work of George Eliot. See Barrett's article, 'The Politics of Sado-Masochism: Swinburne and George Eliot' in *The Whole Muisc of Passion: New Essays on Swinburne*, ed. Rikky Rooksby & Nicholas Shrimpton (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), pp.107-119.

[36] Anonymous review in the *Academy* LIII (January 1, 1898), 13-14.

devotees of the goddess Artemis. The central thematic concern of *Atalanta* and *Callirhoë* is the irresistible cravings of desire that create tension in the individual who attempts to resist the inner compulsion to love and be loved. Yet, *Callirhoë* is more of a riposte to than a replication of Swinburne's Hellenic drama. In Field's drama the worship of Dionysus allows the female characters to enthusiastically embrace pleasure, rather than to renounce it. The inner conflict of the chief protagonist is thereby resolved and *Callirhoë* ends, in stark contrast to *Atalanta*, with a victory for the powers of female passion.

This essential difference in approach to the fortunes of passion derives not only from the changing nature of the sexual politics of Victorian Aestheticism, but also the internal structures of the dramas. If both Swinburne and Field compose their dramas in the best traditions of the Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedies, with which they were so familiar, the plays diverge with regard to their Greek inheritances.[37] Swinburne took Aeschylus's tragic trilogy *Oresteia* as his central source, whilst it can be seen that Michael Field opts for a more female-friendly Euripidean approach to the same theme of unrequited passion.[38]

For some critics, Swinburne's transgressive aesthetic is, like Pater's, problematic in relation to women. For instance, Riede suggests that Swinburne's 'church' of rebellious poets is a male-dominatèd faction:

> Even though Swinburne traced the origins of the great tradition back to Sappho, even though he several times remarked that 'great poets are bisexual; male and female at once' (*Works*, 14.305), even though he was chastized by the manly critics of his age as a kind of poetic hermaphrodite, the tendency of Swinburne's reliance on a classical tradition that had become an exclusively male inheritance was to cut his verse off from the expression of what might be called a female point of view.[39]

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[37] Riede suggests that Swinburne's early poetry 'gains its resonance and much of its effect by alluding to or echoing earlier generations of poets from Aeschylus and Sappho through Shakespeare and Shelley.' Similarly, Bradley and Cooper attempt to situate their work firmly within the classical traditions of English literature. In a letter to Robert Browning Edith mentions that, 'my Aunt and I work together after the fashion of Beaumont and Fletcher,' clearly indicating their familiarity with Renaissance dramatists. See *Works and Days*, p.3 and also David G. Riede, 'Swinburne and Romantic Authority' in *The Whole Music of Passion* (see Barrett above), pp.22-39 (p.28).

[38] See Froma I. Zeitlin's groundbreaking essay, 'The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the *Oresteia*,' *Arethusa* 11 (1978), 149-184, for a more detailed discussion of the sexual politics of Aeschylus.

[39] Riede, p.35.

I would suggest that Bradley and Cooper's transgressive Hellenism makes them potential saints of Swinburne's 'church of rebels.'

Moreover, as Maxwell points out, 'Swinburne's honouring of female power is undisguised. As *femme fatale*, goddess or muse, embodied in abstractions such as Liberty or Fate, or as nature or natural power such as the sea, the female principle is predominant in his work.'[40] Furthermore, if, as Barrett notes, Swinburne's 'preoccupations with powerful images of women, with androgyny, generated startling new ideas of femininity and of the relations between the sexes,' then Swinburne and Michael Field have much in common.[41] Yet, by building on the liberal developments in Hellenism made by both Pater and Swinburne, Bradley and Cooper ensure that their transgressive, eroticized Hellenism includes a distinctly 'female' point of view.

Michael Field's *Callirhoë* begins at the temple of Bacchus in Calydon. As the temple is situated in the heart of Calydon, one would expect the religion of Dionysus to occupy a central position in the social and religious life of city. Bradley and Cooper indicate that Dionysus is not a god of the centre; he is a god of the margins. He is, according to tradition, the quintessential representative of alterity, as Vernant explains:

> Alterity is a sudden intrusion of that which alienates us from daily existence, from the normal course of things, from ourselves: disguise, masquerade, drunkenness, play, theater, and finally, trance and ecstatic delirium. Dionysos teaches or compels us to become other than what we ordinarily are, to experience in this life here below the sensation of escape toward a disconcerting strangeness.[42]

In ancient literature and legend, Dionysus is represented as a protean god who can be invoked to symbolize festivity, ritual, fertility, nature, sexuality, wine, song, dance, comedy and the celebration of 'femininity' on the one hand, and violence, bestiality, death, disorder, tragedy and unrestrained 'masculinity' on the other. The sexes are combined in his body in a way that unsettles restricted accounts of gender and notions of the sacred.

As a wild god of the margins Dionysus traditionally has a strong relationship with women. Dionysus' protean nature not only allows him to express his 'femininity,' his

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[40] See Catherine Maxwell's discussion of Swinburne in, *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), especially chapter four.
[41] Dorothea Barrett, p.116.
[42] Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals*, p.196.

cult represents the repressed emotionality often associated with women. Segal tells us that the cult of Dionysus gave to women a power and importance that were denied them, on the whole, in fifth-century Athens.[43] Yet it does so in a complex and ambiguous way. The religion of Dionysus releases the emotional violence associated with women and gives it a formalized place in ritual. However, Maenadism in Greek culture was also associated with dangerously transgressive behaviour that operated in contradistinction to the laws of the *polis*.

Part of the attraction of Maenadic worship was in the rite of *oreibasia*, the revel on the mountains where those repressed emotional energies could have free play. The *oreibasia* encouraged women to celebrate their god out in the open, beyond the walls of the *polis*, thereby providing women with probably the only legitimate reason for leaving the house. Yet, the act of becoming a Maenad did not just involve the orderly production of celebratory songs and dances in honour of Dionysus. In becoming one with the god one would experience Bacchic 'madness,' allowing the votaries to experience another mode of reality.[44] The religious rites also included the violent acts of *sparagmos,* the rending apart a sacrificial animal and *ōmophagia*, of joy in the eating of raw flesh. Of course, the eating of raw flesh suggests that the maenadic body is anything but 'contained.'

It is easy to see the appeal of Dionysus for women, as worshippers of the god they could abandon their banal domestic chores and civic duties as wives and mothers, in favour of unrestrained drunken orgies on a hillside, far away from the incessant demands of male relatives. Such a religion, Winnington-Ingram suggests, 'so novel, so attractive, and so obviously dangerous, could not but meet with opposition when it attempted to proselytise a land which had already attained a sober habit of worship.'[45] In the *Bacchae*, Euripides makes this conflict, between a religion dominated by women which celebrates women's physical and sexual freedom and the male phallic order of the *polis*, central to his philosophical plot. And it is precisely this conflict which Bradley and Cooper re-create and re-examine in *Callirhoë*.

In Michael Field's play the destabilization of Calydon's social and sexual categories begins not with the worship of Dionysus, as one might expect, but with the

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[43] Charles Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*, p.159
[44] Zeitlin, 'Cultic Models of the Female,' p.130
[45] R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1969), p.1

worship of the goddess Artemis. Initially, Artemis seems to serve the same function as the character of Athena in Bradley and Cooper's *Bellerophôn*. According to tradition, Artemis was said to have been an educator of young women, who oversaw their transition from the wildness of youth to their responsibilities as adults in the civic community. Bradley and Cooper employ this premise, as Callirhoë, like Bellerophôn before her, seeks spiritual guidance from a virgin goddess, in order to keep her on the proverbial straight and narrow. But Callirhoë is no saint and so she prays to the goddess to purge her of her rebelliousness, 'to protect/ My thoughts from lawless wandering beyond bound/ Of thy own sacred precincts.' But her thoughts will not be contained.

In his anthropological and psychological analysis of the Greek gods, Vernant points out that the wild virgin goddess is something of a contradictory character:

> She is the Huntress, the one who runs in the woods, the Wild One, the Archer, who shoots wild animals with her weapons and whose arrows, when used among humans, sometimes strike women unexpectedly and bring them sudden death. She is also the Maiden, the pure Parthenos, dedicated to eternal virginity, the one who leads, in joyous dance, music, and beautiful song, that gracious chorus of adolescent girls she makes her companions— the Nymphs and Graces.[46]

Artemis, then, traditionally occupies 'a liminal position that is uncertain and equivocal, where the boundaries separating boys from girls, the young from the adults, and beasts from men are not yet clearly fixed. They fluctuate and slide from one state to another.'[47] As goddess of the margins, of borderlands, Artemis 'sees to it that the boundaries between the wild and the civilized are permeable in some way, since the hunt allows passage from one state to another.'[48] Furthermore, Artemis is, along with Dionysus, a 'barbarian' Olympian. She is welcomed by the Greeks and integrated into their religious pantheon, but her 'otherness' remains part of her appeal. Artemis is a civilizing force but she is never fully 'civilized.' Bradley and Cooper tap into this ambiguity in Artemis' character in order to suggest that their heroine has chosen to follow a warrior-goddess, who is far from a clearly defined paragon of 'feminine' virtue.

According to myth, Artemis's incivility culminates in her demand for sacrificial blood. Indeed, Artemis's capacity for vengefulness and cruelty is exemplified by the

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[46] Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals*, p.196
[47] Vernant, p.199.
[48] Vernant, p.198

legend of the Calydonian Boar Hunt. Classical sources suggest that Artemis took revenge on the city of Calydon because King Œneus had overlooked the goddess from his sacrificial offering to the Olympians.[49] Offended by the King's negligence, Artemis sends a wild boar to terrorize the citizens and ravage the land. The King's son Meleager organizes a hunt for the boar, which is attended by the greatest heroes in Greece. As part of her cunning plan, Artemis dispatches her most skilled huntress, Atalanta, to attend the hunt. To the surprise of the other male hunters Atalanta is the first to wound the boar, which Meleager then kills. Regardless of Atalanta's fiercely defended chastity, Meleager falls in love with the huntress and determines to give Atalanta the boar's skin as a reward for her valor. Queen Althaea's brothers, Plexippus and Toxeus, violently object to Meleager's gesture of love and respect for a woman. A fight ensues and Meleager kills his uncles. Althaea, having already prophesized Meleager's death, then takes vengeance on her son for killing her brothers. With the destruction of the Royal House, Artemis's bloody revenge is complete.

Swinburne retold the myth of the Calydonian Boar Hunt in his important drama *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865). In Swinburne's version, as Adam Roberts points out, 'Artemis fashions a twofold attack on Calydon: she attacks the *polis* from the outside (with the boar), and undermines its unity from the inside (Meleager's love for Atalanta destroys the unity of the royal family).'[50] Artemis's instrument of divine retribution is, of course, her dedicated disciple Atalanta. Atalanta is, in Swinburne's words, 'Chaste, dedicated to pure prayers, and filled/ With higher thoughts than heaven.'[51] But Atalanta is also a highly ambiguous figure; a holy virgin 'fashioned for a sword.' To Althaea and Oeneus, the virginal Atalanta is 'unwomanlike,' 'not like the natural flower of things.' Atalanta wishes to remain in the female sphere of Artemis, and so she pursues the traditionally masculine and warlike activity of hunting as a refuge from amorous desire and the conjugal state. For Swinburne, Atalanta is an enticing, emasculating figure of fatal power, despite her claims to spiritual purity.

Swinburne's Artemis and Atalanta are subversive female characters. And yet, neither character represents real freedom. Artemis (and Atalanta) may blur the boundaries

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[49] The myth of the Calydonian Boar Hunt was recorded by Pausanias and later, by Ovid.
[50] Adam Roberts, 'Hunting and Sacrifice in Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon* and *Erechtheus*', in *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 31 (1991), 757-771 (p.760).
[51] Swinburne, *Atalanta in Calydon*, (London: Chatto & Windus, [1865] 1880), p.10.

of gender and conventional behaviour, but Artemis's claims to chastity restricts her conduct. As a follower of Artemis, Bradley and Cooper's heroine would be, like Atalanta, an unnatural, yet virtuous 'virgin' on the margins of the civilized world. On the other hand, as a disciple of Dionysus, Callirhoë would have the choice of sexual as well as physical freedom. The philosophical dilemma at the heart of Michael Field's play is how will Callirhoë choose to live, with Artemis' fierce restraint or with Dionysiac enthusiasm?

Callirhoë is first depicted as a dutiful and domesticated maiden spinning at her loom, reminding us of Penelope, the virtuous wife of Homer's *Odyssey*.[52] However, the seemingly dutiful and innocent Callirhoë has a violent side to her nature, which has the potential to be exploited. The Bacchic priest Coresus has already witnessed Callirhoë's direct participation in the bloody sacrifice of a bull. Coresus interprets this act as proof of Callirhoë's potential as a Maenad and an indication of her capacity for extreme violence:

> From the cerulean
> The glittering fire outbroke. It played on her;
> I caught her face tempestuous with delight.
> But momently
> I looked on her; the crowed was gathering,
> The swarthy bull was waiting for the knife,
> And, ere the heavier thunder shook the shrine,
> Its neck was severed. O Anaitis, there
> Is the true Maenad! The wide difference
> 'Twixt love and love, and oh! the wider room
> Twixt pieties! (I,i)

The reflective light of the ritual fire illuminates Callirhoë's attraction to the dark side of her religion. Callirhoë's sublimation of her violent impulses into ritual acts gives Coresus hope that he may be able to harness her aggression, within a religious structure that celebrates female violence. Indeed, as Rene Girard points out, once aroused, the urge to violence lingers on, 'violence is not to be denied, but it can be diverted to another object.'[53] In fact Coresus knows that the wide difference 'twixt pieties' is really not wide

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[52] This image, of a seemingly passive maiden, is not without its subversive symbolism. Callirhoë's skillful twining of purple thread is reminiscent of the spinning of the Moirai (the Fates). Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos are representatives of female power as, according to legend, all living beings will eventually submit to the destinies as laid out for us by the three divine daughters of Zeus and Themis.

[53] See René Girard's foundational study, *Violence and the Sacred* (London: Continuum, [1972] 2005), p.4

at all. In the figure of Artemis, Callirhoë, like Atalanta, has already had contact with wildness. It is therefore unlikely that Callirhoë will be able to perpetually resist the calls of the maenads.

One character who revels in the violent rituals that are demanded of the maenads is the seductive and highly sexualized figure of Anaitis. Maenad-in-chief to the band of female worshippers, Anaitis's behaviour blurs the distinction between dutiful observance and frenzied indulgence. Anaitis enjoys 'the sensuality of violence,' rather like Swinburne's famously sado-masochistic Lesbian lover, Anactoria. But one violent act that disturbs Anaitis is her prophetic dream that Coresus will be sacrificed, stabbed to death on the altar of the Temple of Bacchus.[54] The High Priest dismisses Anaitis' concerns, persuading her that her gory dream must have been prompted by memories of her violent rampage the night before:

> Ay, thou rememberest how the hinds were torn
> In the last chase. Dione cried to see
> The fleecy fringes of her nebris dyed
> In blood, and fled. Then didst thou catch her hair,
> And fling her, as a slender ivy-wand,
> Amid the bloody fragments. Thought of this—
> Her horror, thy o'erhasty violence—
> Hath trampled with rough footstep on thy rest. (I,i)

Anaitis's violence against Dione seems excessive and potentially dangerous. And yet, Anaitis's 'o'erhasty violence' is justifiable within the context of Dionysiac worship. Coresus believes that Anaitis's violent behaviour will ultimately be controlled by her observance of religious rites.

In the ancient world, maenads were not seen as extremists or terrorists battling against the patriarchal system that oppressed women. Rather, their presence and transgressive behaviour was, to a certain extent, sanctioned by that same system. The cult of Dionysus was often seen as a form of containment, governing the excesses of female behaviour within an organized religious structure. As Zeitlin points out, 'the dream of a perfectly equilibrated mechanism as the ideal state of society has given way to the

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[54] I borrow the phrase the 'sensuality of violence' from Cheryl Walker who explores the relationship between violence and women poets in her essay, 'The Whip Signature: Violence, Feminism and Women Poets', in *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian: Gender and Genre, 1830-1900*, eds., Armstrong & Blain (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp.33-49.

conviction that disorder is a vital and necessary pole of order. In this more dynamic model, rituals, like art, for all their orderly frames, often celebrate or tolerate disorder.'[55] However, in Michael Field's Victorian drama, Anaitis threatens to transgress the limits of 'contained' female rage. Coresus admonishes Anaitis for her 'maniac face' and compares her with a wild panther. 'But,' he tells her, 'I do not care to herd/ With beasts as fierce as he, perfidious!' (I,i). It seems that Coresus is a little daunted by the potential power of a frenzied maenad. And so he should be.

In nineteenth-century art and literature the maenad was frequently depicted as a radical revolutionary figure. Indeed, Linda Shires observes that during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in both England and France, 'the image of woman as unnatural, whether depicted as maenad, bacchant, or fury, becomes increasingly prevalent.'[56] In the early stages of the century the maenad is explicitly associated with the iconography of the French Revolution. One particularly thinks of Eugene Delacroix's famous painting, *Liberty Leading the People at the Barricades of Paris* (1831), in which a bare-breasted maenadic woman leads the charge of the Revolutionary mob. By the 1840s, Shires suggests, the maenad loses her connection with the historical and geographical events of the Revolution. Over the Channel, the 'unnatural woman provides a locus for the intensified fears of revolution, in an England which wants, at all costs, to preserve the stability of government.'[57] Fears of a maenad-driven revolution were manifest in the literature of the period, as Shires points out:

> Texts dealing overtly with political revolution, including Carlyle's massive and influential *History of the Revolution* (1837), inevitably raise once again the issue of women's participation in the public sphere...His blending of female power and mad excess in the figure of the maenad, a Bacchant who tears flesh from her victims, was later transformed by Charles Dickens, also ambivalent about female power, into the passionate murderess Hortense in *Bleak House* (1852-3) or the bloodthirsty Madame DeFarge in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859).

Ironically, such texts assume female power as a given and therefore 'begin to create a viable cultural space for female power and thus establish important ideological ground

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[55] Zeitlin, 'Cultic Models of the Female,' p.132

[56] Linda M. Shires, 'Of maenads, mothers and feminized males: Victorian readings of the French Revolution' in *Re-Writing the Victorians: Theory, History and the Politics of Gender*, ed. Linda M. Shires (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 147-165 (p.147).

[57] Shires, p.148.

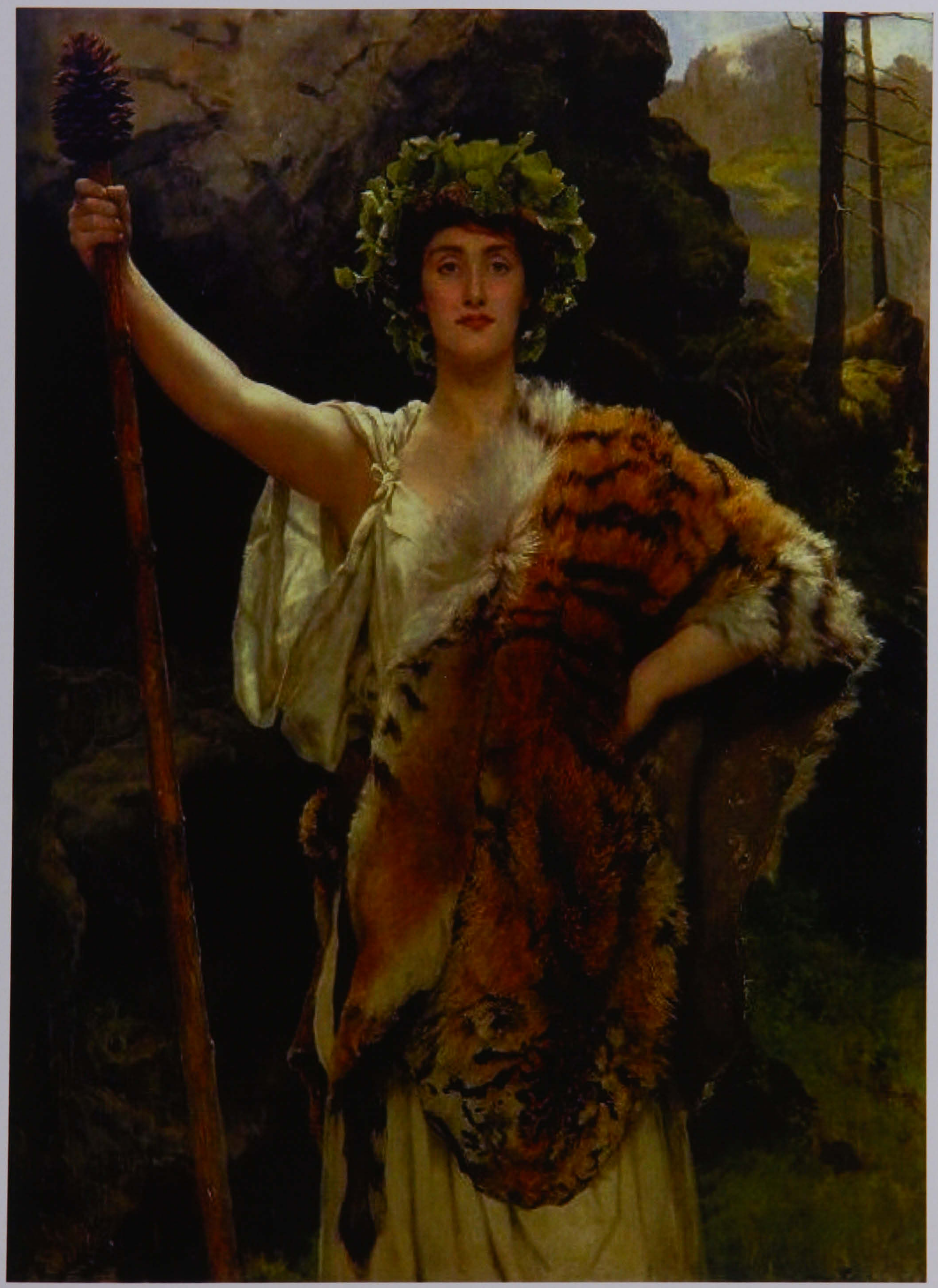

Plate III, *A Priestess of Bacchus* (1890) by John Collier

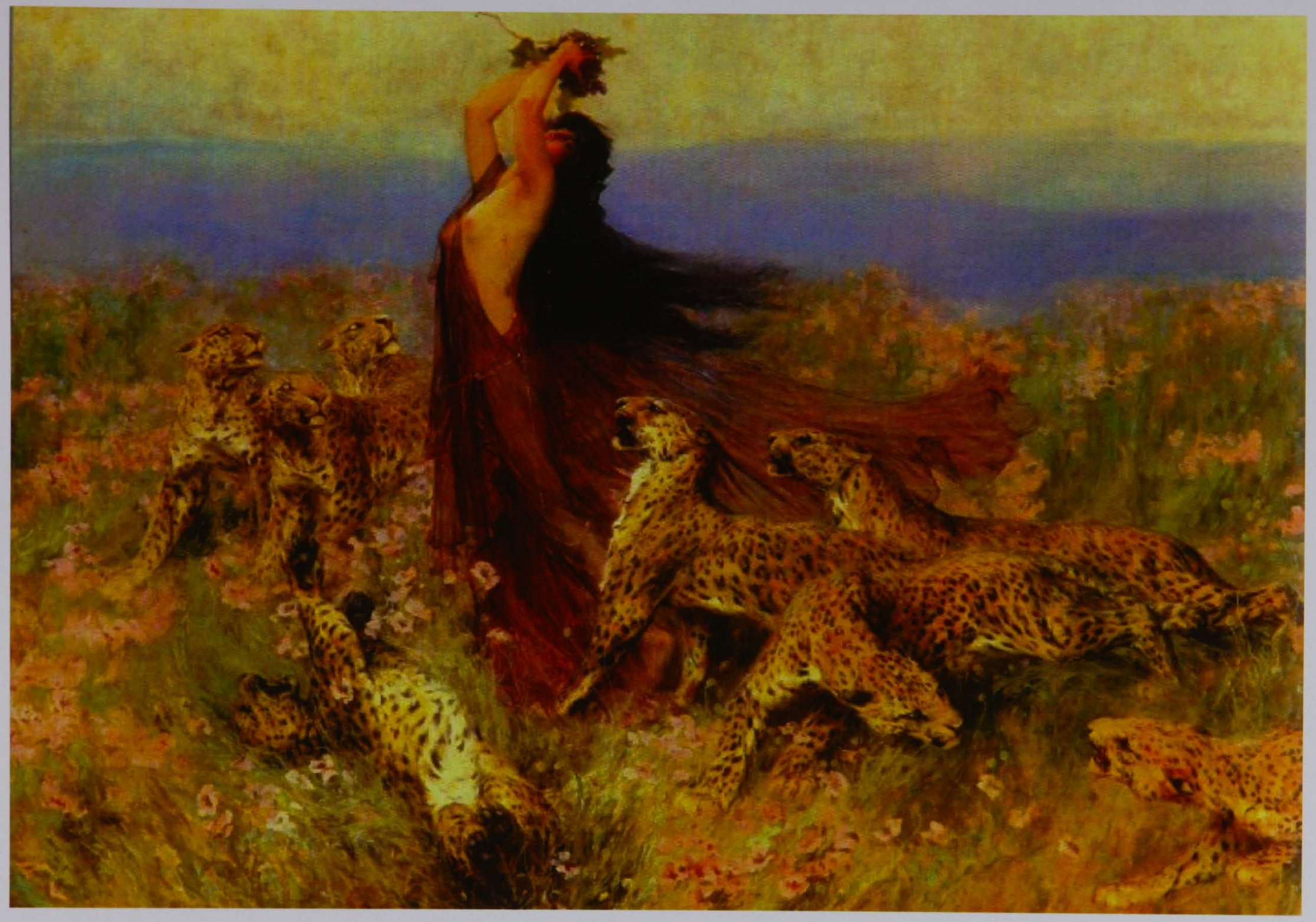

Plate IV, Arthur Wardle, *A Bacchante* (1909)

for the feminist movement which re-emerges forcefully in the 1850s and 1860s.'[58] Later in the century, the figure of the 'unnatural woman,' whether maenad or Amazon, was embraced by the suffragist movement. And she did intend political revolution.

One of the main reasons that the maenad was perceived to be so unruly was because of her hyper-sexual female body. In the ancient world maenads, like their god, would often robe themselves in the skins of wild animals, to signify their immediate relationship with the wild. The paintings of notable Victorian artists including Lawrence Alma Tadema, Arthur Wardle and John Collier depict maenads with the deliberately disturbing quality of rampant, animalistic sexuality (plates III, IV). The bestial associations of the maenad, which were supposedly alien to English notions of propriety, actually made maenads all the more alluring. As Bram Dijkstra points out, 'the nymphs, sirens, and maenads of late nineteenth century art were the visual expression of a heady mixture of wish-fulfillment fantasies, fear, horror, hope, and revulsion crowding the nineteenth-century male mind.'[59] In the figure of Anaitis, Bradley and Cooper not only parody this mixture of wish-fulfillment and horror, but also embrace the sexual associations of the maenad.

In *Callirhoë*, Coresus, the priest-come-pimp of the Maenads, instructs Anaitis to 'win' the maids of Calydon on his behalf. One of the central motifs of Swinburne's *Atalanta* is that of the hunt. In Bradley and Cooper's drama the 'conversion' of the Calydonian maidens is also conceived in terms of the hunt; Anaitis is the wild leopard and the maids her prey. The hunt may have a number of representational meanings, but the most evident, is that of the hunt as an act of sexual seduction. In *Callirhoë,* as in *Atalanta,* the metaphorical purpose of the hunt is not to tame or civilize wildness, but to destabilize and undermine 'civilized' behaviour.[60] For Coresus, the conquered and converted maids will be the sexual spoils of a battle won by the triumphal forces of the wild. Clothed in the leopard-skin of a Bacchant, Anaitis deliberately represents bestial female sexuality, sexual rapacity and sado-masochism. In this sense, Bradley and Cooper exploit the liberatory potential of maenadism, as the cult of Dionysus acknowledges the power of female desire and sexual subjectivity.

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[58] Shires, p.149.
[59] Bram Dijkstra, p.250.
[60] See Roberts'. 'Hunting and Sacrifice in Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon* and *Erechtheus*' for an interesting reading of 'the hunt.'

The priest directs Anaitis to lure Callirhoë's companion, Nephele, into the Bacchic cult. Nephele is described as easy prey, a docile goat tethered 'to graze.' Nephele will be willing prey for the experienced huntress, as she is perceived to have the potential for rebellion. Anaitis seduces Nephele into the ranks of the Maenads and her induction into the cult is described in explicitly sexual terms. But when she arrives at Callirhoë's house, disheveled and distressed, with her hair unbound and lips discoloured, we wonder just how violent Anaitis's recruitment of Nephele has been. At first, she tells Callirhoë that she has suffered a 'perilous grief,' 'a shame/ So wild and strange' that she must tell her friend of her fate. But then she reveals to her companion:

> To the red bower
> Of oleander, by the forest-stream,
> Where thou and I in girlish solitude
> So oft have hidden for sweet conference,
> I went, and looking up, saw— not thy clear
> Calm brows, Callirhoë— a face as bright
> As burnished shield, with hair that looked alive,
> And cloak of shining hide. I lay as still
> As if a leopard couched there; but she came,
> The wondrous creature, threw her spells on me,
> And emptied my young heart as easily
> As from a pomegranate one plucks the seeds.
> And then she drew me, in caressing arms,
> By the secret pathways, to the temple-gates,
> Where stood Coresus. (I, ii)

Nephele's feelings of 'shame' that her 'pure' body has been tainted by her association with a Maenad, makes the erotic aspects of her liaison with Anaitis ever more visible. Indeed, Nephele's description of her initiation into the cult of Dionysus is permeated with religious symbolism and suggestions of same-sex desire. For instance, in ancient Greece the pomegranate, the forbidden fruit with which Nephele compares her heart, was associated with Aphrodite and was used in rituals which consecrated a marital union.[61]

In the nineteenth century the pomegranate itself became an aesthetic symbol of sexual awakening and spiritual rebirth, appearing in numerous texts and paintings including Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* (1865), Oscar Wilde's *A House of*

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[61] The pomegranate is a powerful and ancient symbol which appears in numerous sources including Homer's famous 'Hymn to Demeter.' See also Detienne's detailed analysis of the significance of the pomegranate in *Dionysus Slain* (Baltimore, London: John Hopkins University Press, 1979), pp.42-44.

Pomegranates (1891) and in Vernon Lee's *Hauntings* (1890) and *Vanitas* (1892). Swinburne famously recounted the myth of the Roman goddess Proserpine in his atheistic poem, 'Hymn to Prosperpine.' In *Greek Studies* (1920) Walter Pater wrote two essays on the myth of Demeter and Persephone, in which he emphasizes the love between the two women. Persephone is said by Pater to be 'consumed within herself by desire for her mother.' Persephone's love is thereby eroticized by Pater, whose subtle representation of the myth suggests the possibility of same-sex desire. Likewise, Michael Field later produced the poem 'Pomegranates' which also features the sensual figure of Proserpine, who clutches the 'ruddy' fruit, of her desire close to her chest.[62] In *Callirhoë* however, it is Nephele's pink flesh that will be devoured like that of the erotic fruit. But unlike Persephone, Nephele seems reluctant to return from her trip to the dark side.

What Anaitis offers is not just sexual pleasure and liberation, but also membership of the *thiasos*, the sacred community of the maenads. Communion with other young women is something that Nephele seeks. Thus far, Nephele has only been able to meet with other young women in the oleander bower. This space acts as a hidden retreat for young women, where, Nephele reveals, she has enjoyed many 'sweet' meetings with Callirhoë. It is likely that Bradley and Cooper intended the bower to represent a *hieron*, a sanctuary devoted to and protected by the goddess Artemis. The sanctuary served as an educational and nurturing space in ancient Greece where young girls would be 'tamed' by the goddess in preparation for marriage and cohabitation. However, from her meetings with Callirhoë in the oleander bower Nephele seems to have learnt, not how to prepare for marriage and co-habitation with a man, but the delights of female companionship. In this clandestine female space, it is Nephele who lies in wait like an untamed 'couched leopard.' She is not the passive prey that Coresus envisages, but a sexual huntress in her own right. Nephele is suitably entranced by the animation of Anaitis, the 'wondrous creature' before her, and appears to give more than her heart over to the beguiling maenad. The wild woman then leads the enchanted Nephele down 'secret pathways,' that we know will lead her way off the beaten track.

Nephele then confesses to Callirhoë that at the temple, surrounded by maenads, she felt like 'a bride, half-swooning in the flare/ Of Hymen's torches.' She reveals that

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[62] Michael Field, 'Pomegranates,' in *The Wattlefold: Unpublished Poems by Michael Field*, collected by Emily C. Fortey (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1930).

she was so 'caught up by the great choric throng' that she found herself 'whirling the thyrsus.' The entire female community of Bacchants has seduced Nephele, and her initiation, Prins suggests, 'serves as an alternative to marriage and the revelation of another kind of love.'[63] However, Nephele's predatory behaviour and willingness to be led astray suggests that she might be familiar with 'alternative' forms of love already. Indeed, when Nephele compares her induction by Coresus with the rape of Europa by Zeus: 'He beckoned me, / As the mild bull Agenor's child,' it seems that she is truly unprepared for the sexual advances of the male priest. This shocking allusion begs the question, is rape the medium by which Coresus gains control over the maenads?

Nephele continues her narrative and reveals to Callirhoë that she was 'doomed' when she felt 'the Maenads gather round me.' Nephele pauses at the climatic moment of her story, just when she is about to reveal the orgiastic conclusion of the night's events. Suddenly racked with shame and 'wonder at myself,' Nephele appeals to Callirhoë for shelter. Her 'shame' and her desire to be hidden in Callirhoë's closet indicate that in her recent behavior Nephele has acted against notions of propriety. Bradley and Cooper's clever pause at the moment of revelation invites us to evaluate Nephele's actions. Just how much pleasure has Nephele enthusiastically enjoyed and what kind of punishment must she receive for her 'transgressions'? Bradley and Cooper encourage their audience to speculate.

After concealing the tainted maiden in her bedroom, Callirhoë takes her place at the loom, her own dull spinning starkly contrasting with Nephele's whirling of the fetishistic object of the *thyrsus*. She decides, as she spins, that she will scold Nephele 'for her wilfulness,/ And take her back, in penitence and tears,/ To her old tasks.' But her condemnation of Nephele is short-lived as she struggles with her own rebellious thoughts:

> I'm tired of spinning! In the viny sweeps
> Of sunshine on the hills, if a god lurk,
> Deliverer of women from their toil
> In household darkness to the broad sweet light,
> Do they so ill to flee to him for joy?
> "Can it be meant," I often ask myself,
> "Callirhoë, that thou shouldst simply spin,
> Be borne of torches to the bridal-bed,
> Still a babe's hunger, and then simply die,

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[63] Prins, 'Greek Maenads, Victorian Spinsters,' p.56.

Or wither at the distaff, who hast felt
A longing for the hills and ecstasy?" (I, ii)

Callirhoë is attracted to the idea of a god who could deliver her from the daily demands of her life as a desperate Greek housewife. Like Xantippe, she longs to be emancipated from the darkness of the *oikos* and the endless rotations of the loom. However, in ancient Greece (and similarly in Victorian England) marriage and motherhood were primarily social and political functions, not personal life events.[64] Her choices are limited and yet Callirhoë realizes that in order to gain emotional and physical independence, she must reject the gender role with which she has been assigned. If she is to achieve any measure of personal freedom her first task is to reject the normative heterosexual role of nurturing motherhood.

In *The Bacchae,* Dionysus' success in destroying the social order of Thebes can be partly attributed to his 'liberation' of the women of the city. Dionysus extends his influence by maddening those women who are solidly established in their position of wife and mother. The god is able to destabilize the *polis* through the disruption of the *oikos,* as he exploits the potential for violence within the family. But in contrast to Agave in *The Bacchae* and Swinburne's *Oresteia*-inspired *Atalanta,* the vicious castrating mother-figure is absent in *Callirhoë.* In a typically seditious gesture it is Callirhoë's father who is castrated, through blindness. The very Victorian cliché of nurturing motherhood is thereby rejected by Michael Field, who refuse to contain their female characters within traditional gender paradigms.[65]

As Callirhoë muses on her 'longing for the hills and ecstasy' her thoughts return to Artemis and her fabled claim of perpetual 'chastity':

The fair twinned sister of the Delian
Must empty the rich passions of her heart
Where purple arbute-boughs encompass her,
In safest silence, or the bosky oak
Lets not a sigh escape. She must be mute,
The fair twinned sister of the Delian.
For him, the sunshine and the song; for her,
The virgin lip and the inviolate shade. (I, ii)

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[64] See Roger Just's *Women in Athenian Law and Life*, especially chapter four.
[65] The only biological mother figure in the drama is Aglauria, Machaon's mother, who is a minor figure and a staunch traditionalist, determined to see her aging son marry.

In the ancient world, as Pomeroy notes, Artemis' failure to marry was misinterpreted as virginity by succeeding generations of men who connected loss of virginity only with conventional marriage.[66] Bradley and Cooper again play on the ambiguities in the mythical accounts of Artemis, in order to emphasize that the goddess is not immune to love and desire. Bradley and Cooper suggest that unlike her male twin, Apollo, Artemis is unable to celebrate her *homo*-sexuality in public, as the patriarchal structure of Olympus does not allow for autonomous female sexuality.

Katharine and Edith briefly peek into the female-friendly space of Artemis's sanctuary, where the goddess is able to unveil her 'rich passions' in safety. Artemis's passions are therefore either auto-erotic or she shares them with the maids, the other *parthenoi*, who she calls her own. Either way, Bradley and Cooper re-present Artemis's (lack of) passion as dissenting, in that her sexual identity is not normatively heterosexual. However, Bradley and Cooper also indicate the negative potential for melancholy isolation, as a result of furtive same-sex desire. Indeed, Michael Field's drama highlights the inequities of the Olympian social structure which oblige Artemis to repress and contain her sexual passions within a repressive heterosexual framework. Callirhoë, Bradley and Cooper's insightful heroine, is aware of this duplicity and hypocrisy. She knows that as a daughter of Zeus, even the divine Artemis is seemingly unable to escape the rigidly sexist ordering of gender roles.

In her prescribed female space at the loom Callirhoë continues to muse over Nephele's attraction to the cult of Dionysus. She realizes that her companion is 'a girl/ Full of sweet impulse' and not a dangerous anarchist after all. Her initial feeling is to 'gather her/ To my still bosom, and receive her love,' but, she says, 'we are sundered' (I, ii). Callirhoë knows that her intimate relationship with Nephele could easily jeopardize her resistance to the religion of Dionysus. Could it be, she asks, that 'this new god/ Of the warm vineyards and the budding trees/ Could draw her trembling spirit to the brink?' Her own sense of disturbance drives Callirhoë to 'strip' away the ivy meshes from Nephele's body and to cleanse her lips from stain, before dressing her in a 'white vesture meet for a maid.' The pure-white garments are intended to cleanse the soul, as well as the body of the tainted maiden. But if the vesture is able to contain and restrict her body it cannot

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[66] Pomeroy, p.6.

restrict the emotional and psychological wanderings of both young women. The white vesture also reminds us of the dresses and corsets of Victorian maids, which were intended to restrict not only women's physical movements, but also their behaviour.

Yopie Prins suggests that in the figure of the Greek maenad Bradley and Cooper 'found an imaginary alternative to the Victorian spinster.'[67] In the nineteenth century the disobedient daughter who refused to marry constituted a major problem in the Victorian imagination. Part of the threat, Ruth Vanita suggests, 'may have been her living to grow old and become a figure of authority' and her potential for 'lesbianism'.[68] Those women who were unmarried, and therefore outside of the socially and politically sanctioned model of female virtue, frequently found themselves metamorphosed into the sexually anarchic 'wild women' of popular consciousness. As Dowling suggests, wild (unmarried) women came to symbolize 'an emergent realm of irrational and unknowable forces.'[69] The single woman who could threaten the stability of society was frequently defined in terms of maenadic madness and such images of female excess became, in some decadent circles, what Dijkstra calls 'idols of perversity.'[70] What these 'perverse' single women actually represented was the overwhelming proliferation of modernity, of unstoppable change that would irrevocably alter the social structure of England. But, as Linda Shires observes, the nineteenth-century wild woman did not exist in isolation: 'the maenad, bacchant, or fury does not exist alone but always belongs to a cultural configuration which includes the mother as its other half...and which also includes the feminizing of men.'[71]

As we have seen, Bradley and Cooper refuse the notion of republican motherhood in *Callirhoë*. The only maternal figures in *Callirhoë* are Aglauria, Machaon's mother and Demophile, Calydon's wet-nurse. Aglauria is a bitter old woman who has no sympathy whatsoever for the maenads, and little feeling for her own son. Demophile is a far more sympathetic character, yet she is a substitute mother-figure. As in *Bellerophôn*, Bradley and Cooper seem reluctant to confine their female characters to biologically determined roles. Bradley and Cooper are keen to represent 'effeminate' male characters in contrast to the rampaging maenads. In *Callirhoë,* the virility and civic masculinity of the male

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[67] Yopie Prins, 'Greek Maenads, Victorian Spinsters,' p.46.
[68] Vanita, p.30
[69] Dowling, p.21
[70] See Dijkstra's incisive analysis of the art of the fin de siècle. *Idols of Perversity.*

citizens of Calydon is shown to be fatally compromised. For Machaon, the sceptical doctor of Calydon, the situation has reached crisis point:

> And I marvel not the women of Lemnos slew
> Fathers, husbands, brothers, and put an end to population
> Till they could furnish their brats with heroic fatherhood.
> Oh, we fail not in the stuff of motherhood; but the
> Heroes —the heroes![72] (II, ix)

Machaon diagnoses the male citizens with 'emasculation.' His cure, if his reference to the legend of Lemnos is anything to go by, is to 'cleanse' the city of effeminate males. A lack of 'heroic' male citizens means that Calydon is in danger of falling to non-citizens, to women.[73] In *Callirhoë*, as in *Bellerophôn*, Bradley and Cooper can be seen to parody the notion of heroic masculinity as espoused by conservative critics like Robert Buchanan.

In representing effeminate men and masculinized women Bradley and Cooper can again be seen to echo Swinburne's transgressive Hellenism. Swinburne was of course one of the main targets of Buchanan's 'Fleshly School' attack. Swinburne was, according to Buchanan, not only guilty of 'the smile of harlotry and the shriek of atheism' in his work, he is also the quintessential effeminate poet, 'long-ringleted, flippant-lipped, down-cheeked, amorous lidded.'[74] Swinburne not only challenges the notion, but also emphasizes the failure of heroic masculinity in his early masterpiece *Atalanta in Calydon.*

In *Atalanta,* the Calydonians assemble the greatest heroes in Greece for a hunt

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[71] Shires, p.148.

[72] The ancient Greek writer Appollonius Rhodopius recorded the story of the women of Lemnos and their ruler Hypsipyle. When the Argonauts landed in Lemnos they found the island to be bereft of men. The Argonauts heard how the Lemnian women had failed to worship Aphrodite and as punishment for their disrespect, Aphrodite conferred a fetid smell on the women. Repelled by the smell of the women, the men of Lemnos sailed to Thrace where they captured and bedded Thracian maidens. Outraged by their infidelity, the women conspired to murder the men on their return to Lemnos. All of the men were killed, with the exception of Thoas, who was saved from the slaughter by his daughter, Hypsipyle. The Lemnian women took the newly arrived nautical heroes to their beds and the curse was lifted. Hypsipyle bore the Greek hero Jason two sons before he left with the Argonauts on his journey home. From that time onwards, the population of Lemnos was said to have a heroic lineage.

[73] Thaïs Morgan suggests that the ideal of civic masculinity has three analogous levels: 'the putative condition of "ethical virility" provides the male citizen with the ability to exercise self-control, resulting in "sexual virility" according to the model of "social virility." The man who fails to meet any area of his obligations is considered "effeminate." See Thaïs Morgan's article, 'Victorian Effeminacies,' in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* (see Morgan above), p.111.

[74] Buchanan, 'Review of *Poems and Ballads*,' in *The Athenaeum* 48 (1866). Reprinted in *Swinburne the Critical Heritage*, ed. C.K. Hyder (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970),p. 137-138.

that will rid them of their 'four-foot plague;' the boar sent by Artemis. However, according to the ridiculously macho hunter Plexippus, it is the 'masculine' figure of Atalanta who is the real threat, not the boar. Plexippus petitions Meleager, telling him that if Atalanta remains with the hunt the world as he knows it will be turned inside out and upside down: 'Then shall the heifer and her mate lock horns,/ And the bride overbear the groom, and men/ Gods.'[75] To Plexippus the health and order of the *polis* depends upon the precarious balance achieved by sexual difference. By striking the first decisive blow against the boar Atalanta usurps the authority of the male hunters. With the exception of Meleager, the male hunters are shown to be woefully inadequate in their roles as heroic warriors. Hyleus is (penetrated and) killed by the tusk of the boar; Plexippus fires a phallic 'double dart' but misses the boar entirely; whilst Peleus fires past the boar striking his 'loving countryman' Eurytion. Furthermore, Meleager's defence of Atalanta's prowess effectively castrates and unmans his male companions. Swinburne demonstrates the power of a chaste (divine) maiden, as Artemis undermines the social organization and hierarchy of the warrior-citizens by attacking their sense of masculinity.[76]

In *Callirhoë* Bradley and Cooper also emphasize that anxiety regarding gender roles generates violence and disorder, especially against women. The violence conventionally associated with heroic masculinity, which should be reserved for the battlefield, is instead acted out in the home. The insightful Machaon reprimands Nephele's father, Megillus, for his part in the decline of the heroic warrior-ideal:

> Great zeal for justice! Now I think of it,
> That very day you beat poor Nephele,
> The pestilence—
> Before it was a summer sickness— grew
> Deadly in force. That I distinctly marked.
> The gods, discriminative, will adjust— (III, i)

For the emasculated male citizens of Bradley and Cooper's Calydon, the *oikos* is the new battleground. But as Machaon points out, as arbiters of justice, the gods (Bradley and Cooper) will not allow the endless persecution of one sex by another.

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[75] Swinburne, *Atalanta in Calydon*, p.39-40.

If feminized males represent dis-ease in the city of Calydon, then Dionysus is an epidemic god.[77] Segal reminds us that, according to tradition, Dionysus 'is a male god, but he has the softness, sensuality, and emotionality that the Greeks generally associate with women. He has the force and energy of a vigorous young man, but the grace, charm, and beauty of a girl.'[78] The god's influence can therefore be seen as 'both sacrament and pollution.'[79] In his analysis of Euripides's *Bacchae*, Jean Pierre-Vernant compares the sudden incursion of Dionysus to that of 'a contagious disease': 'when he erupts in a place that has had little exposure to him, he makes quick inroads and his worship spreads like a flood. Suddenly otherness—the other-than-oneself— asserts its presence in the most familiar places: an epidemic disease.'[80] In *Callirhoë* Bradley and Cooper build on the notion of infection as depicted in Euripides's *Bacchae*. Indeed, Machaon denounces the arrival of the Maenads in terms of pollution and infection:

> The air hath been unwholesome many weeks.
> Women, disordered and intoxicate
> Returning from their revel on the hills,
> Have filled their homes with fever, and increased
> A sickness that, without this irritant,
> Had not exceeded in fatality
> The plague of the great feast ten years ago.
> Men were not then half frenzied, and a few,
> Yielding to counsel, were restored to health. (II, vi)

Machaon again suggests that the behaviour of the 'disordered and intoxicate' women is not the sole cause of the dis-ease in Calydon. The religion of Dionysus merely inflames the 'fever' which already lurks within the city. Machaon also makes the point that the plague of a decade ago was not as threatening as the present plague as the male citizens 'were not then half frenzied' and that they yielded to the counsel of other men. In other words, Apollonian rationality won the day and the civic (phallic) order of Calydon was restored. But in Bradley and Cooper's drama, the contagious irrationality of Dionysus

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[76] For a more detailed discussion of Artemis's victory see Mark Seigchrist's article 'Artemis's Revenge: A Reading of Atalanta in Calydon' in *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 20 (1980): 695-712.
[77] Jean- Pierre Vernant, following the work of Marcel Detienne, has suggested that Dionysus can be seen as an epidemic god.
[78] Charles Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*, p.10.
[79] Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*, p.12.
[80] Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Universe, the Gods and Mortals* (London: Profile Books, 2001), p.135-136

will not be so easily defeated.

The religion of Dionysus can be seen as a threat on two levels; Dionysus not only usurps traditional gender roles but, through the celebration of passion and the pre-eminence of feeling, he erodes the laws of the polis. In his reading of Euripides's *Bacchae,* Vernant's allegorical interpretation of Dionysiac religion emphasizes the Otherness of Dionysus, the dark Dionysus that lurks within us all.[81] From this perspective, the worship of Dionysus can be seen by others as a form of 'madness', which may seem 'more like the symptom of some sickness.'[82] Vernant continues, 'it is as if insofar as one human group refuses to acknowledge the other, to grant it a share, the first group becomes monstrously other itself.'[83] In other words, 'those who embodied the unconditional attachment to the unchanging, who proclaimed the need to preserve traditional values against whatever is other from themselves, against whatever questions them or forces them to see themselves differently—these "identitarians," the Greek citizens confident of their superiority— are the very ones who topple over into absolute otherness, into horror, into the monstrous.'[84]

In *Callirhoë,* Bradley and Cooper similarly explore the dark side of Dionysus. Callirhoë's father, Cephalus, describes such a collapse of identity when he claims that the male citizens of Calydon (the 'identitarians' of Vernant's analysis) become 'uncivilized' and have 'grown wild' as a result of the new religion:

> Nay, child, we suffer for the foolishness
> That has bewitched this city; drunken heaps
> Of maddened women have infected it.
> The babe hath perished, while the mother's breast
> Has suckled the young panther on the hills.
> Men, of their wives forsaken, have grown wild,
> Disordered, hungry, and uncivilized.
> Apollo sees his sister's shrine desert,
> Her virgin followers flocking to the hills
> For all unseemly revel. (II, ii)

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[81] Vernant's analysis, as Albert Heinrichs points out, owes a large debt to the work of Fredrich Nietzsche, especially *The Birth of Tragedy*. See Heinrichs, "He has a God in Him": Human and Divine in the Modern Perceptions of Dionysus.'

[82] Vernant, *The Universe, the Gods and Mortals*, p.149.

[83] Vernant, *The Universe, the Gods and Mortals*, p.152

[84] Vernant, *The Universe, the Gods and Mortals*,p.151.

To Cephalus, the social order depends on the behaviour of the women and maidens of Calydon. The *oikos*, the home, is the bed-rock of the *polis*. If the women fail to meet their responsibilities as wives and mothers, the patriarchal family unit will collapse, and the *polis* will be plunged into chaos. The men of Bradley and Cooper's Calydon are beginning to realize the power of wild women and the precarious nature of identitarian politics.

The helpless cries of the Calydonian males are also designed to echo the chorus of Victorian critics, who decried the advance of the 'New Woman.'[85] For instance, as early as 1868, Eliza Lynn Linton lambasted the 'Girl of the Period' as prone:

> to slang, bold talk, and fastness; to the love of pleasure and indifference to duty; to the desire of money before either love or happiness; to uselessness at home, dissatisfaction with the monotony of ordinary life, and horror of all useful work; in a word, to the worst forms of luxury and selfishness, to the most fatal effects arising from want of high principle and absence of tender feeling.[86]

In response, Linton suggested that, 'all we can do is wait patiently until the national madness has passed, and our women have come back again to the old English ideal, once the most beautiful, the most modest, the most essentially womanly in the world.'[87] The old ideal did not return. Indeed, in 'The Modern Revolt' Linton attacked the 'late remarkable outbreak of women against the restrictions under which they have hitherto lived.' Linton considered women who rejected the socially prescribed role of bourgeois maternity as members of a 'mad rebellion against the natural duties of their sex, and those characteristics known in the mass as womanliness.'[88] Twenty years later Linton began another tabloid campaign against the 'Wild Women' of the late nineteenth century. Despite Linton's protests, the 'mad rebellion' would not stop.

It is in the rapid conversion of the women of Calydon to the religion of Dionysus that *Callirhoë* most resembles Euripides' *Bacchae*. However, there is one important exception to the swelling ranks of Michael Field's maenads. Callirhoë has been 'trained in the old pieties' and she is most reluctant to relinquish her old allegiances. Coresus,

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[85] Anne Ardis reminds us that before the 'official' coinage of the phrase, 'New Woman' in 1894, she was called 'Novissima, the Odd Woman, the Wild Woman, and the Superfluous or Redundant Woman.' See Ardis, *New Women, New Novels* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p.10.
[86] Eliza Lynn Linton, 'The Girl of the Period,' p.340.
[87] Linton, 'The Girl of the Period,' p.340.
[88] Eliza Lynn Linton, 'The Modern Revolt' *Macmillan's* 23 (December, 1870): 142.

besotted by Callirhoë and her fierce piousness, attempts to persuade her of the merits of Dionysiac religion:

> I seek
> To ransom, not enslave, Callirhoë,
> Calling all men to the Deliverer.
> Look in mine eyes, and say if servitude
> Be not your daily portion. Can you set
> Your limbs free to the rhythm of your soul?
> Is there a passion in you that dare speak?
> Are not your bosom's offspring, young desires,
> Served to you mutilate, a sick'ning food
> By the world's impious custom? Spurn the feast
> As the Divinity the Libyan dish. (I, ii)

If we recall Julia Saville's observation about the ideal Victorian woman, that she was 'expected to be guileless' and 'the mistress of self-restraint and maidenly modesty,' then Callirhoë is a paragon of Victorian femininity.[89] However, renunciation is, to this priest at least, impious. Coresus and his maenads call 'all men to the Deliverer,' in the hope that women can be freed from 'servitude.' According to the priest, the immoral customs of the *polis* pervert and 'mutilate' Callirhoë's 'young desires.' After all, in the religion of Dionysus, sexual and spiritual ecstasies are one in the same thing. Coresus' provocative question, 'is there a passion in you that dare speak?' predicts Alfred Douglas's famous homosexual refrain of 'the love that dare not speak its name.' Callirhoë dares to tell Coresus of her impious desires for physical freedom 'and love of creatures other than myself.' Her desire for love and pleasure is strong, but her drive to resist pleasure, to conform to social and religious expectations, is just as fierce. In Callirhoë the battle between asceticism and aestheticism, restraint and emotionalism, rages.

Through Coresus, Bradley and Cooper suggest that Dionysian emotionalism can be liberating and energizing. Indeed, Coresus is a significant figure for Michael Field, as Bradley explains in an annotated copy of *Callirhoë*:

> Coresus must not be another Bellerophon. His must be [an] over energetic, passionate nature, wilder & more mystic than the ordinary Greek type; of riotous & fervid imagination…having deep sympathy with the god who was born of such a shock & storm of passion, who had himself suffered persecution &

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[89] Saville, p.527.

> madness...the intoxication of nature, of love, & of oracular inspiration. All these great blasts of powerful [ ] life seem to him divine; to yield to them is worship—the god, as it were, incapacitates his worshipper, & kills him in communicating the divine life as Zeus slew the adoring Semele. We must not shrink from the perilous embrace of these mighty inspirations.[90]

For Bradley and Cooper, Coresus 'is a poet in the old Greek sense of a frenzied one.' He has the 'thirst to taste other than the mere human forms of life, the desire to escape from self into something new & strange.' It is Coresus' job, just like it is Bradley and Cooper's job, to persuade us that Callirhoë should embrace the mighty inspiration of Dionysus. Callirhoë is, however, fearful of the vengeful power of Coresus and Dionysus and it is her fear that fuels her resistance. She is aware that 'he provokes men to unnatural deeds,/ And once stirred frenzied mother as a fell/ Tigress to murder her deluded son.' Bradley and Cooper's direct reference to Euripides' *Bacchae* underlines the dramatic and philosophic continuities between the dramas. But Callirhoë is determined not to be a victim, or a perpetrator of Bacchic *mania,* like Euripides's Agave.

In response, Coresus knows that he must change focus, from the pain and punishment of rejecting Dionysus, to the pleasures to be gained from Dionysiac emotionalism. Consequently, the Priest attempts to educate Callirhoë in the divine nature of physical love. But unlike Socrates' edification of Alkibiades in the *Symposium,* Coresus stresses to Callirhoë the divine nature of lust, not the virtues of a rational, intellectual love. If, he suggests, Callirhoë could only experience the sensuality of *eros*, the libidinal energies of Dionysiac desire, then Coresus is sure that she would renounce her worship of Artemis in favour of his god of sensation:

> Turn not away, Callirhoë; by goads
> The ox-souled must be driven; yield response
> To Heaven's desire of thee; love humanly.
> Love is the frenzy that unfolds ourselves;
> Before it seizes us we are ignorant
> Of our own power as reed-bed of the pipe. (I, ii)

In contradistinction to Platonic philosophy, sexual passion as represented by Coresus is divine and not a base, animalistic impulse which must be suppressed. Coresus

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[90] Annotated copy of *Callirhoë* held at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS.Eng.poet.e.70.

suggests that to love 'humanly' is in itself divine. The supposedly competing claims of the body and spirit do not, in his religion, conflict. Coresus suggests that when love is a divinely inspired frenzy which unfolds social and self-imposed restraints, it is foolish to resist its power. Indeed, one may be spiritually and artistically energized by the power of physical desire. Unlike Swinburne's Atalanta, who never wavers from her decision to renounce heterosexual pleasure, Callirhoë has already admitted her need for love and erotic fulfillment. Her concerns relate to the effects that a religion dominated by women and emotion will have on the 'rational' citizens of the *polis*.

Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon,* as Wymer observes, presents 'the tragic struggle of the youthful quest for freedom and fullness of life and love, represented by Meleager, against the old-age forces of repression, fear of life, and destructive, possessive love, represented by Althaea.'[91] Further, Wymer suggests that in *Atalanta* Swinburne deliberates over the 'mystery, ultimately the psychology, of the conservative and progressive personalities: on the one hand is the despair of life, the dependence on law and custom as established, the association of change with destruction...an essentially defensive posture; on the other hand is the lust for life, for freedom and creativity...an offensive, challenging and hopeful posture.'[92] It can be seen that in *Callirhoë* the same conflict is played out in the character of Callirhoë. Bradley and Cooper's heroine is faced with a dilemma; should she embrace the forces of change or, observe the male-dominated traditions and customs of the *polis*? She would be a beneficiary of social change, but her father and brother would suffer a loss of power and identity under a Dionysian system.

Coresus, the seditious Nietzschean agent of Bradley and Cooper, is firmly on the side of change:

> He came to bring
> Life, more abundant life, into a world
> That doled its joys as a starved city doles
> Its miserable scraps of mummying bread.
> He came to gladden and exalt, all such
> Must suffer. Call men to the battle, swords
> Clash the response; bid them arouse themselves
> From foolish habit, customary sloth... (I, ii)

Callirhoë knows that the battle to come, between the forces of youthful enthusiasm and

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[91] Thomas Wymer, 'Swinburne's Tragic Vision in *Atalanta in Calydon*,' *Victorian Poetry* 9 (1971), 1-16 (p1).

tradition will pit child against parent. She determines that she will not wreck 'my dear father's peace.' So she rejects the 'mocking messenger' who has come 'in Heaven's name to set the child/ Against the parent.'

Once again, one thinks of the late-Victorian diatribes against the 'revolting' daughters of the period. The controversy was not one-way, however. Alys Pearsall Smith wrote 'A Reply from the Daughters,' which was published in the popular periodical, the *Nineteenth Century*. Smith declared:

> The revolt of the daughter is not...a revolt against any merely surface conventionalities...but it is a revolt against a bondage that enslaves her whole life. In the past she has belonged to other people, now she demands to belong to herself...She asks simply and only for freedom to make out of her own life the highest that can be made, and to develop her own individuality as seems to her the wisest and the best. She claims only the ordinary human rights of a human being, and humbly begs that no one will hinder her.[93]

Bradley and Cooper, themselves daughters and not mothers, take the side of the younger generation. The rational order, as represented by the conventional family unit, will be overturned. But not quite yet.

Following Callirhoë's rejection of him and his god, Coresus calls on Dionysus, the 'great Revenger,' to infect the city with plague.[94] We are left to wonder if the priest, who is himself 'like a god,' is in fact Dionysus in disguise. In any case, the offended god will have his revenge on the impious city of Calydon. Panic quickly ensues amongst the male citizens of the beleaguered city and they look for a supernatural explanation for the plague. Again recalling Swinburne's drama, one man suggests that the citizens should sacrifice oxen and wine to the neglected goddess Artemis and plead for her forgiveness. But another declares: 'Nay, let us confess the Bromian with groans/ and orgies' (II, iii). Whilst the divided citizens argue, Megillus recounts the rumour that Callirhoë refusal of

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[92] Wymer, p.6.
[93] Alys Pearsall Smith, 'A Reply from the Daughters' in *Nineteenth Century* (1894), reprinted in Ardis, p.18.
[94] The theme of the maiden punished for her refusal to acknowledge the power of Dionysus occurs in the obscure legends of Minyas and of Proetus, the daughters of whom resisted the god and suffered terrible afflictions for their rejection of him. One legend tells the story of Proetus whose daughters were punished with madness because they despised the cult of Dioysus. Whilst the Boetian myth of the daughters of Minyas tells of the daughters who stayed at home over their weaving and disdained to accompany the other women to the orgies, until suddenly ivy and vine-runners twined themselves around their looms, and milk and honey dropped from the ceiling; in a frenzy they caught up one of their little sons, tore him to pieces, and hurried to the mountains to join the Maenads.

the Bacchic priest has caused the plague. Acephalus, whose daughter has already died of the disease, demands that Callirhoë be given over to the priest. 'We'll not die,' he says 'that she may pick lovers' (II, iii). The rational figure of Machaon quickly intervenes and (somewhat ironically for a scientist) dispatches Callirhoë's 'beautiful' yet feeble brother Emathion to seek advice from the oracle at Dodona.

As the religious and social structures of Calydon collapse, violence erupts throughout the city. As the city's sense of order and organization disintegrates, the maenads are perceived to be a direct threat to the failing stability of the *polis*. The Bacchic religion can no longer be contained within any social structure. When Anaitis provocatively dances in the ashes of the dead, the confused and impotent citizens are quick to direct their fury towards the maenads. They find their Girardian scapegoat in Callirhoë. The citizens cry that they will 'force the lock of every joint/ And strain the hinge of every sinew in/ This hateful, impious body! Drag her on!' But before the citizens have their revenge, Machaon again intervenes:

> I counsel you, good citizens, refrain
> From this mad conduct. Look to it, my friends.
> Just leave these crazy maenads to their cubs;
> Or if you will, drive them without the town;
> Let them grow hungry on the hills, and feed
> On quivering goat's flesh, but don't massacre,
> Lest each slain maenad cost a hecatomb
> Of your best oxen, when Zeus' will is known. (II, vii)

As a man of science, devoted to rationalism, Machaon knows that 'the arts of introspection/ are not for the crowd.' Nevertheless, he contests the very foundation of religious belief: 'There's my mother! Her whole/ religion is an anthology of Olympian scandal. My contempt/ of her hath brought me to this cynicism' (II, vii). But Machaon is no sophist, as he believes himself to be a detached god-like observer of 'men's passions.' In Machaon, Bradley and Cooper have created the perfect rationalist mark. His conversion to the Bacchic religion will reinforce the power of Dionysian passion over rationalism and intellectualism; of aestheticism over ascetism. But for the moment, Machaon is the only citizen preventing the city from falling into anarchy.

At this moment of crisis, Bradley and Cooper introduce the darkest element of ancient Greek religious and social practices; human sacrifice. There is little

archaeological evidence to suggest that human sacrifice was a widespread, accepted practice amongst the ancient Greeks. But in ancient Greek literature and myth, the ritualistic sacrifice of young women is commonplace. Bradley and Cooper make the most of this dark, sinister, religious practice in their own drama. Recalling Nietzsche, in the final scenes of *Callirhoë*, the Greeks appear far from enlightened beings, as conceived of by many Victorian Hellenists.

Having returned from Dodona, Emathion delivers the verdict of the oracle. He reveals that Callirhoë is to be sacrificed, if none will take her place. Emathion asks, 'Is there not one who loves her in this town/ Would succour her?' None of the emasculated male citizens are willing to die to secure the safety of the *polis*, as Machaon points out:

> 'Tis the girl must die,
> If she accept none to die for her...
> …A victim must be passive as a sheep,
> Ba-minded or he'll irritate. You all
> Are well content Callirhoë should die.
> She will be well content. Yet ruffianly
> To fight and bind her were inhuman. (III, i)

It is the role of the female to sacrifice herself for the ideals of the *polis*. Bradley and Cooper's metaphorical symbol of the passive female sheep is highly effective here. As Machaon indicates, the *polis* requires female passivity in order for it to function smoothly. If women were to resist their prescribed roles as sacrificial victims to the demands of the *polis*, then men would be forced to re-evaluate their relationships with women. If they carry out this action, Machaon warns, the citizens will dehumanize and degrade themselves. Machaon's observation also recalls Coresus' vision of Callirhoë at the beginning of the play, when, in her only public role, she slits the throat of the sacrificial bull. To demonstrate her weak, yet sanctified status within the *polis,* Callirhoë has been substituted for the bull. The non-too subtle metaphor, that women are mere lambs to the slaughter in a patriarchal social system, is an interesting political observation by Bradley and Cooper.

When Callirhoë learns that she is to die she begs Emathion for an explanation as to why no man will die on her behalf. As she says, 'I thought the city loved me.' Emathion's reply is incredible: 'men love their lives. You know not how it hurts—/The spectral crowd and the grim ferryman—/ Sharp from the burning sunshine and blithe

youth' (III, ii). Emathion associates men with light and the burning sunshine of a renowned life. Women, on the other hand, are condemned to the dark. As Nicole Loraux suggests, 'the glory of woman was to have no glory.'[95] Emathion, the beautiful male youth who parades in the *palastrea,* is the quintessential example of Calydonian (or Apollonian) manhood; he is morally weak, physically cowardly and spiritually devoid. But Callirhoë is a truly tragic heroine and in death she will achieve the liberation and renown denied her in life.

As Callirhoë realizes that she will be sacrificed by the male citizens, whether she agrees or not, she embraces her fate. Callirhoë's name can now be added to the list of sacrificed virgins from ancient tragedy, including Iphigenia, Polyxena, Macaria and the daughters of Erechtheus, all of whom died for the safety of their community. Loraux makes the somewhat blunt observation that women in tragedy die violently. But the difference, according to Loraux, between life and tragedy is that in tragedy women could master their death. Indeed, 'for women there is liberty in tragedy—liberty in death.'[96] It is now clear why Bradley and Cooper chose the tragedy as their medium. For female writers and characters, tragedy provides a framework for the exploration of suffering, yet the form can also be liberating.

However, the sudden intervention of a male artist threatens to blight Callirhoë's victory. On the altar steps, in the final moments before her sacrifice, Callirhoë is observed by a sculptor:

> Ah! Superb
> Her attitude! With thong of her own fingers
> She's bound her arms back from surrendered breast.
> I've got a subject that will make me great. (III, v)

The voyeuristic male aesthete not only interrupts the narrative, but also objectifies and dehumanizes Callirhoë at the moment of her supposed liberation.[97] The sculptor

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[95] Nicole Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* (Cambridge& London: Harvard University Press, 1987), p.2.
[96] Loraux, *Tragic Ways*, p.17.
[97] The image of a manacled Callirhoë recalls Hiram Powers' statue of 'The Greek Slave.' The statue depicts the idealized figure of a young Greek woman who had been captured by the Turks during the Greek War of Independence. She stands naked, with head slightly bowed and with her hands manacled to a post. Powers' sculpture became famous in Victorian England when Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote a poetical response to the sculptured woman in 1850.

interprets the image of the bound, victimized female virgin as erotic; a great subject for 'art.' This disturbing scene contrasts sharply with Coresus' earlier aesthetic declaration that 'all art is ecstasy, All literature expression of intense/ Enthusiasm: be beside yourself.' Callirhoë is going to be killed into art. In the hands of this male observer, Callirhoë will be captured, literally and metaphorically, as a victim, for posterity. Ecstasy may be generated in the onlooker, but the objectified woman is anything but ecstatic. In this brief intervention, Bradley and Cooper not only suggest the triumph of aestheticism over asceticism, but also highlight the male bias within Victorian aestheticism. Furthermore, when the male artist suggests that he has 'a subject that will make me great,' one thinks of Jean Honoré Fragonard's dramatic composition, *Corésus se sacrifice pour sauver Callirhoé*, which was greeted with critical acclaim when it was displayed at the Parisian Salon in 1765.

Unlike the sculptor's vision, Bradley and Cooper's Greek maiden is not entirely passive at the moment of her death. Callirhoë goads Coresus to take her blood sacrifice that the city might be saved from destruction. She demands he make her a tragic heroine: 'For my people, I/ Come joyfully to die; each breath I draw/ Delays deliv'rance; choose where thou wilt strike' (III, v). Coresus forces the citizens to 'repent their sins' before he turns the knife upon himself, declaring, 'I am dark, and liker wine than she./ I'll keep thy ritual! Behold, I pour!' The Priest's death shocks the onlookers, yet his act of self-sacrifice is greeted with hails. The body of the effeminate priest has been penetrated and the blood of a non-citizen has been given as a libation. The city has been purified and irrationalism has won the day.

In a single stroke of the sacrificial knife, the effeminate priest, whose love Callirhoë scorned, has re-defined heroism and self-sacrifice. His indulgent act of love transforms Callirhoë:

> How thou did'st ope thine eyes wide at the shout;
> And I looked down on thee and drank thy love.
> I am a Mænad; I must have love's wine,
> Coresus, and you die before my face,
> Leaving me here to thirst. I dare not mar
> Thy holy death, mixing my fruitless blood
> With this most precious, sacrificial stream.
> Thine be this day's full glory. (III, v)

As the blood pours from Coresus' body, Callirhoë is suddenly persuaded by the intensity of her dead lover's desire. Callirhoë has been converted, not by rational argument or sophistic rhetoric, but by passionate suffering. The sight of the blood inflames her passion and she resolves to drink 'love's wine.' This appears to be a curiously Christianized conversion. Yet, the emotional impulse is thoroughly pagan; more Dionysus Zagreus than Jesus Christ. Again, Bradley and Cooper suggest that such passion instigates the unraveling of the self, which, paradoxically, may result in fusion with the Other. For Michael Field, if 'love is the frenzy that unfolds,' then desire can be the force that unites.

Her lover's dramatic suicide may have upstaged her for the moment, but Callirhoë will have her victory over the Calydonians. Callirhoë steals the sacrificial knife from Coresus' dead hands. We know that by appropriating his knife, Bradley and Cooper's heroine intends to steal a 'manly,' heroic death. Callirhoë retreats to the woods to find the sacred band of maenads, who will, she hopes, initiate her in the Bacchic rites. In the woods Callirhoë meets Machaon and tells him of her plan to die as one of Coresus' maenads. The jaded doctor replies:

> It would please him best
> You should declare allegiance to the god,
> And make all Calydon subservient
> To the strange worship. Men acclimatize
> To new emotion rapidly; it takes
> Time to develop custom. Clear the truth
> By uproar of the Asiatic band
> Concealed, and overclamoured. (III, viii)

Surprised, Callirhoë asks, 'You discern there is a truth'? Machaon admits that Dionysus 'makes humanity august,/ Fulfilling it with mystery and joy.' The old doctor is not incited with Dionysiac passion, but he is able to perceive the benefits of Dionysian emotionalism. Callirhoë, determined now on her own course of action, implores Machaon to become the new Priest of the Maenads. Mindful of his public skepticism, Callirhoë tells him, 'I know a way to win obedience/ Go quickly; gather the great scattered band' (III, viii). In his absence Callirhoë draws the sacrificial knife and stabs herself. Callirhoë's death may seem inauspicious, but it is truly her own. Again, in a stroke, Calydon's sacrificial victim has transformed herself into a martyr. Callirhoë is now a true

maenad, able to galvanize the Dionysiac revolution, at the moment of her violent death. The manner of her death pleases the Maenads and they finally accept her as one of their own.

It is left to the sceptical male character Machaon to 'rouse the sisterhood.' 'Finding not the wherewithal/ To worship by the altar,' he will instead worship 'in life.' As a 'Bacchanal,' he will relax 'No effort till mankind be broken in/ By discipline of pleasure to true want' (III, viii). New social and sexual dynamics will be instigated. The plague has devastated familial relationships, the foundational source of the male citizens' power. Bradley and Cooper indicate that what is left is the opportunity to form a new society. Invested with Dionysian passion and the wild femininity of the Maenads, Calydon will begin life anew. The maenads, after all, are waiting on the margins.

Dionysus has come to take his place at the heart of a 'feminized' civilization. His is an irresistible force, which cannot be successfully denied or resisted. Whereas Swinburne rejects the 'evil' Olympian/Christian god(s) at the conclusion of *Atalanta*, Michael Field embraces the chthonic religion of Dionysus. Nevertheless, as Wymer suggests, *Atalanta in Calydon* establishes 'Swinburne's quest for a liberating Dionysian neopaganism.'[98] Perhaps detecting the echo of his own influence Swinburne was, according to Robert Browning, 'generous' in his appraisal of *Callirhoë*.[99] He had every reason to be so. *Callirhoë* can be seen as a successful re-vision of Euripides' *Bacchae* and Swinburne's liberatory Dionysian poetics. Bradley and Cooper's play is a radical examination of sexualities and gender; a savage attack on classical models of social organization; a satire on the gender politics of Victorian society and a treatise on the need for an ethics of 'feeling' in contemporary life. In *Callirhoë* Michael Field effectively recover the maenad as a positive and liberatory figure. Yet, it is Dionysus who is the ideal vehicle through which Michael Field is able to explore the kaleidoscopic possibilities of sexual and spiritual liberation.

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[98] Thomas L. Wymer, p. 1.
[99] See *Works and Days*, p.14.

Dark Eros in Lesbos: Michael Field's *Long Ago*

If *Bellerophôn* and *Callirhoë* are about the resistance to, and the acceptance of, pleasure, then *Long Ago* juxtaposes the dangers of *eros* alongside sensual indulgence. *Eros* in Michael Field's Lesbian landscape is not just 'bittersweet,' it is frequently torturous and ultimately fatal. As well as the fierce sexual jealousy and furious passions of those within the Lesbian community, this extraordinary text is also marked with instances of extreme sexual violence. The volume features a whole host of characters from other violent Greek legends, such as Daphne, Tiresias, Dryope, and Boreas. These figures are not included in the original Sapphic fragments. But such characters do feature in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Ovid depicts a universe in which human beings are frequently at the mercy of arbitrary and irresistible forces. As E.J. Kenney notes of the *Metamorphoses*, 'repeatedly, the emphasis is on deception and violence; the reader soon comes to realize that the description of an idyllic landscape is a prelude to rape or bloodshed. Nothing is ever quite what it seems; nobody's identity is ever wholly secure.'[1] Partly inspired by the tales of Ovid, I suggest that the world of *Long Ago* is similarly controlled by the often brutal force of 'Dark Eros.' Furthermore, the Dionysian impulse, so evident in the earlier Hellenic dramas, also features in *Long Ago*. *Eros*, unimpeded by the demands of Christian morality, is envisaged as a similarly affirmative force. Yet, like the wine of Bacchus, *eros* also threatens chaos. Despite the darkness, the maidens of *Long Ago* enjoy personal agency and sexual empowerment. Indeed, desire in Michael Field's Lesbos can be joyous and fulfilling. But when love is tinged by the sour notes of possession and obsession, desire becomes something to fear. As a young woman Katharine wrote, 'wild gusts of passion sweep over me, and leave me desolated in body and spirit. As such times, I feel evil as a stray man within me.'[2] This extraordinarily powerful sensation may have been experienced years earlier, but the same sentiment can be seen in the 'Dark Eros' of *Long Ago*.

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[1] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Melville, introduced & notes by E.J. Kenney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.xviii.
[2] Quotation in Donoghue, p.17.

Poem 'L' highlights the competing passions in *Long Ago*. In this poem, Sappho longs to sing like the ancient lyric poet Anacreon, who was famous for his elegant and melodious drinking odes and (same-sex) love songs. But unlike her male peer, Sappho is unable to defy the lure of 'Dark Eros':

> O Muse, 'tis for Anacreon's lyre I sigh:
> Thou knowest how
> 'Neath the twin burthen of desire and song
> My heart doth bow;
> But he was strong
> Dark Eros to defy,
> And my tossed bosom oft
> Turns to his sweet refrain
> Of sunny truth,
> Jocund, melodious, soft— (p.84)

Anticipating the theories of Freud, eros and creativity are intimately linked in *Long Ago*. But whereas Freud considers that libidinal forces, such as Eros, have to be repressed for the benefits of culture to spring forth, Bradley and Cooper emphasize the connection between pleasure, sensuousness, beauty, truth and art.[3] Sappho is depicted as a woman consumed by sexual desire, which is also the rich source of her art. She may find temporary solace in the harmonious love songs of Anacreon, but as a passionate woman and an artist, Sappho is inexorably drawn to the creative complexities of 'Dark Eros.'

Described by Hesiod in his *Theogony,* Eros is said to be born from Chaos, at the same time as the Earth and Tartarus. Hesiod conceives Eros not merely as the god of sensual love, but as a power which forms the world by inner union of the separated elements. Describing him as the 'fairest among the deathless gods,' Hesiod also reveals that Eros 'unnerves the limbs and overcomes the mind and wise counsels of all gods and all men within them' (120). He is the comrade of Aphrodité from the moment of her birth (173). The brother of Eros is Anteros, the god of mutual love, whilst his companions include Pothos and Himeros, the personifications of longing and desire, along with Peitho (Persuasion), the Muses and the Graces. Zeus is said to have armed Eros with wings and with bow and unerring arrows, or burning torches. In later Roman sources Eros is often depicted as Aphrodite's adolescent son, Cupid. But in the nineteenth century, Eros

(Cupid) is depicted by Adolphe-William Bougereau and others, as more of a naughty child than a fearful god.

That Bradley and Cooper were not only aware of, but preferred the original chaotic nature of Eros can be seen from this poem from *Wild Honey*[4]:

> O Eros of the mountains, of the earth,
> One thing I know of thee that thou art old,
> Far, sovereign, lonesome tyrant of the dearth
> Of chaos, ruler of the primal cold!
> None gave thee nurture: chaos' icy rings
> Pressed on thy plenitude. O fostering power,
> Thine the first voice, first warmth, first golden wings,
> First blowing zephyr, earliest opened flower,
> Thine the first smile of Time: Thou hast no mate,
> Thou art alone forever, giving all:
> After thine image, Love, thou did'st create
> Man to be poor, man to be prodigal;
> And thus, O awful god, he is endued
> With the raw hungers of thy solitude.

Eros is, simultaneously, the 'first warmth' and 'ruler of the primal cold.' His paradoxical nature reflects the emotional paradox of love; as Anne Carson puts it, 'love and hate bifurcate Eros.'[5] In the following pages I will examine the complexities of eros in relation to Bradley and Cooper's Sapphic community. I will also explore Bradley and Cooper's deployment of Ovidian myths, as a means of explicating the violent contradictions and sexual politics involved in representations of Greek eros.

Love lyrics were as ubiquitous in nineteenth-century literature as at anytime in the previous centuries. And, as Hilary Fraser has shown, women writers made significant, often subversive contributions to the genre of nineteenth-century love poems.[6] Despite the fact that Michael Field's Sappho is an instructor in love and that many of the poems in *Long Ago* concern love, the volume, as a whole, is more overtly erotic than romantic.

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[3] I am referring to Freud's theory of erotic sublimation as outlined in *Civilization and its Discontents* (London: Penguin, [1930] 2002).

[4] One may have chosen another of Bradley and Cooper's earlier poems on the subject of eros, such as 'Erôs and Anterôs,' 'Erôs and Psuchê' or 'When the Roses Where All White' from *Bellerophôn*, or perhaps 'Eros' or 'The Goad' from *Dedicated*.

[5] Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Normal; London: Dalkey Archive Press, [1986] 2005), p. 9.

[6] See Fraser's valuable overview of women's love poetry in the nineteenth century, 'Love's Citadel Unmann'd': Victorian Women's Love Poetry' in *Constructing Gender*, eds., Fraser & R.S. White (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1994), pp.132- 156.

As Maynard points out, 'courtly love' 'needs to be understood as a psychic positioning of women between men.'[7] Consequently, rather than situated in the courtly love tradition, *Long Ago* can be seen to reside in the tradition of erotic poetry in the nineteenth century. Moreover, Michael Field's classically erotic lyrics can be seen to provide an alternative to the idealized, pederastic love of writers like Pater, Symonds and Wilde.[8]

Eros was a particularly popular figure in nineteenth century literature, for both male and female writers. Charles Hoffman, Edmund Gosse, Henry Brownell, Coventry Patmore, Oscar Wilde, Julia Ward Howe, Rose Cooke and Anne Lynch Botta, amongst others, all wrote lyrics on the primeval Greek god. But perhaps two of the most important poems on Eros were written by the 'Demoniac' himself, Algernon Charles Swinburne.[9] In *A Century of Roundels* (1883), Swinburne includes the poems 'Eros' and 'απεροτοσ εροσ' (aperotos eros), alongside other lyrics on the loss of love and sorrow. Much in line with Bradley and Cooper's later lyrics, Swinburne describes Eros as, 'Strong as death, and cruel as the grave,/ Clothed with a cloud and tempest's blackening breath,/ Known of death's dread self, whom none outbrave.' As Harrison suggests, Swinburne well knew that the etymological origins of 'passion' derived from the Greek *pathos* and the Latin *passio*, meaning suffering.[10] In Swinburne's erotic poetry passion and suffering go hand in hand.

Of course, Swinburne's classically informed poetry also featured Lesbian maidens, as well as primordial gods. In keeping with the French tradition, Swinburne re-imagined Sappho in decidedly sex-sational terms in 'Anactoria'[11]:

> MY life is bitter with thy love; thine eyes
> Blind me, thy tresses burn me, thy sharp sighs
> Divide my flesh and spirit with soft sound,

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[7] John Maynard, 'Sexuality and Love' in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry* (see Saville above), pp.543-566 (p.554).

[8] For an interesting reading of Sapphic poetry in relation to the ideal love or pederastic tradition see De Jean, *Fictions of Sappho, 1546-1937* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), especially chapter three.

[9] Ruskin describes Swinburne as a 'Demoniac youth' in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton, 22nd January, 1866. See *Letters of John Ruskin to Charles Eliot Norton,* ed., C.E. Norton, 2 vols. (New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1904), I: 157.

[10] Anthony H. Harrison, 'Swinburne's Losses: The Poetics of Passion', *ELH* 49 (1982): 689-706, (696-7).

[11] Swinburne's Lesbian maidens can be seen to follow the rapaciously sexual example of Sappho set by Charles Baudelarire's in *Les Fleurs Du Mal* (1857). See, for example, Julian Baird's article, 'Swinburne, Sade, and Blake: The Pleasure-Pain Paradox,' *Victorian Poetry* 9 (1971): 49-75.

And my blood strengthens, and my veins abound.
I pray thee sigh not, speak not, draw not breath;
Let life burn down, and dream it is not death.
I would the sea had hidden us, the fire
(Wilt thou fear that, and fear not my desire?)
Severed the bones that bleach, the flesh that cleaves,
And let our sifted ashes drop like leaves.
I feel thy blood against my blood: my pain
Pains thee, and lips bruise lips, and vein stings vein.
Let fruit be crushed on fruit, let flower on flower,
Breast kindle breast, and either burn one hour.[12]

But, Swinburne's sensational poetry was not merely intended to shock. As Harrison explains, Swinburne wrote erotic lyrics 'not merely for the sake of notoriety, but in order to express as powerfully as possible his sense of life's inevitably tragic development for all spirited men and women: tragic because satisfying our passionate impulses is ultimately impossible.'[13] Furthermore, Connolly and Harrison point out that, for Swinburne, the greatest poetry always expresses a 'moral passion' which fills verse 'with a divine force of meaning' which enables the poet to transcend the material world in order to commune with the spiritual.[14] Indeed, Swinburne stated that in order to justify the 'serious and deliberate display of merely physical emotion in literature or art,' one or both of the following elements must be present: either 'intense depth of feeling, expressed with inspired perfection of simplicity, with divine sublimity of fascination, as by Sappho; or transcendent supremacy of actual and irresistible beauty in such relation of naked nature as was possible to Titian.'[15] Sensuality, spirituality and creativity are, in Swinburne's poetic vision, inextricably wedded together. I suggest that Bradley and Cooper echo Swinburne's literary and philosophical premise, that it is the poet's moral duty to record the full force of passion, and its tragic consequences.

Michael Field's *Long Ago* is a multi-layered, multi-authored performance of the already complex Sapphic signature. As Joan De Jean, Susan Gubar, Yopie Prins and Margaret Reynolds have observed, Sappho was a highly significant and highly popular

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[12] Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'Anactoria' (lines, 1-14), from *Poems and Ballads, First Series* (London: Moxon, 1866). Swinburne returned to the subject of Sappho in 'Sapphics' (1866) and much later in, 'On the Cliffs' (1905).
[13] Harrison, 'Swinburne's Losses,' p.690.
[14] I am paraphrasing Harrison here. Harrison quotes and develops Connolly's reading of Swinburne's theory of poetry in 'Swinburne's Losses.' See also Thomas E. Connolly's *Swinburne's Theory of Poetry* (Syracuse: 1964).

figure for poets, translators and artists throughout the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries.[16] As *the* pre-eminent woman poet, it is far from surprising that Sappho featured heavily in the work of women writers of the period. Letitia Landon or 'L.E.L.', Caroline Norton, Christina Rossetti and Catherine Amy Dawson Scott all produced notable representations of Sappho and her work.[17] Like Plato's *Symposium*, however, Sappho's lyrics were also subject to revision and excision with regard to the same-sex pronouns by translators, editors and interpreters.[18]

De Jean suggests that the nineteenth-century tradition of Sapphic scholarship is 'inaugurated with the attempt to resurrect Sappho's poetic genius by severing the poet's ties to the woman.'[19] In other words, the issue of Sappho's sexual morality became a critical battlefield. White finds that, 'where some writers attempted to recuperate at all costs the great poet from accusations of lewdness, Michael Field holds her up as a paragon among women.'[20] Certainly no chaste paragon in the style of Bellerophôn or Callirhoë, Michael Field's Sappho can be seen to revere sensual love. Acutely aware of and sensitive to critical opinion, Bradley and Cooper go to some lengths to create a Sappho who can rise above accusations of base sensualism. Indeed, it is important to note that Bradley and Cooper do not attempt to replicate Swinburne's lyrical sado-masochism, as seen in 'Anactoria.' In *Long Ago,* Sappho's experience of pain is psychological and spiritual, rather than corporeal. Consequently, Michael Field can be seen to attempt to side-step moral issues, in relation to Sappho's erotic expressiveness.

Bradley and Cooper wrote *Long Ago* in a cultural climate of anxiety and contest with regard to sexual expression. As John Maynard points out, the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 carried the demands of the forces for moral purity: 'through the Labouchere amendment the Act created the legal wedge for invading the late Victorians

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[15] Swinburne's *Works* XV, p.315-16. Cited by Harrison in 'Swinburne's Losses,' p.693.

[16] De Jean's history of Sapphic scholarship primarily traces Sappho's evolution in the French and German traditions, both of which influenced Sappho's reception in England. Gubar (1984) focuses on the influence of Sappho on early twentieth century modernist writers. Reynolds (2003) provides a comprehensive survey of Sappho in the English tradition, whilst Prins concentrates on the various manifestations of *Victorian Sappho.*

[17] In *The Sappho Companion* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), Reynolds also suggests a strong correlation between the erotic lyrics of Amy Levy and the poetry of Sappho, p.269.

[18] In 'The Tiresian Poet: Michael Field' in *Victorian Women Poets: A Critical Reader*, ed. Angela Leighton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996a), White suggests that there are instances of deliberate suppression of the female pronouns in Sappho's lyrics, as in T.W. Higginson's translation published in 1871, p.150.

[19] De Jean, p.204.

[20] White, 'The Tiresian Poet: Michael Field,' p.150.

sexual privacy with a new level of moral-legal violence.'[21] Maynard notes that the passing of the Act spawned a generation of private societies, such as the Moral Reform Union and the Social Purity Alliance, which worked through the legal system to control both sexual activity and expression.[22] As Foucault would have it, such overt attempts at repression were matched by a continual proliferation of innovative and transgressive textual responses, as part of a wider culture of sexuality.[23] Certainly one (predominantly middle-class) strategy, to overcome the lack of vocabulary and to avoid the puritanical censors, was to adapt the language of Hellenism. Yet, by the late 1880s, Hellenic subjects had become so ubiquitous in art and literature that it is difficult to determine to what extent Hellenism can be seen as a 'transgressive' literary strategy, particularly with regard to Sappho.[24] Nevertheless, Michael Field's *Long Ago* can be seen as one of the most innovative texts employing such provocative classical allusions and language within a 'scholarly' framework.

As we know, writers interested in representing male same-sex desire could turn to the work of work of Plato, among others, for a culturally legitimized language of love between men. Indeed, in *Symposium*, *Phaedrus* and *Lysis*, Plato examines the nature of *eros* and *agape* in considerable philosophic detail.[25] In contrast, White suggests that women writers had only 'one classical equivalent to draw upon for expressions and strategies of female-female love—the poetry of Sappho.'[26] Sappho, however, was not an uncontested, uncomplicated muse for women writers. There were dangers, as Yopie Prins explores in *Victorian Sappho*, in re-visioning such a mythologized figure: 'By imitating Sappho's Greek fragments, Michael Field enters into a domain often coded masculine, and, by the end of the nineteenth century, increasingly homosexual.'[27] According to David Moriarty, the 'cult of Lesbos' which emerged in the *fin de siècle,* was dominated by male critics and writers to the extent that 'the lesbian is most often treated as a vehicle

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[21] See John Maynard's chapter, p.546.
[22] Maynard, p.546.
[23] Maynard makes the important observation that Foucault 'sometimes seems to scorn the development of the great mass of sexual thinking that he chronicles,' p.547.
[24] In *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne* (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 2001) Maxwell points out that, 'the OED cites Swinburne for the first use of the sexual term 'Lesbianism' four years after the publication of *Poems and Ballads*.' p.182. By 1870, therefore, Swinburne returned the same-sex pronouns to Sappho's sexual experiences.
[25] For a compelling reading of Plato's conception of eros see Catherine Osborne's *Eros Unveiled: Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).
[26] Chris White, '"Poets and lovers evermore"' p.28.
[27] Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, p. 77.

Plate V, Simeon Solomon's provocative *Sappho and Erinna in the Garden of Mytilene* (1864)

for male fantasies.'[28] Richard Dellamora also observes that in the nineteenth century Sappho was invoked as a pre-eminent example of the genius of the Greeks, as defined by *male* pederasty.[29]

For instance, Simeon Solomon created one of the most interesting and provocative of portraits of Sappho in 1864, entitled *Sappho and Erinna in the Garden of Mytilene* (Plate V). This lush, intimate scene is one of the few paintings which actually depict Sappho touching another woman. As De Jean points out, Solomon not only moved in the same circles as John Addington Symonds, but also his painting of Sappho decorated rooms at Oxford in the 1860s. As a result, and 'perhaps under Symonds's influence, Sappho had already assumed the role of patron saint of modern (homo)sexuality that is forecast for her at the end of *A Problem in Greek Ethics*.'[30] Prins suggests, by deliberately drawing on the established associations between Hellenism and homosexuality, Bradley and Cooper 'imply a lesbian eroticism distinct from the troping of homosexual desire. They imagine an ancient Greek world inhabited not only by the pupils of Socrates, but also by young women.'[31]

Arguing against the 'critical orthodoxy' of scholars like Dellamora and Morgan, Catherine Maxwell suggests that Sappho is re-established as a powerful female figure, as the 'feminine' precursor of the lyric tradition, in the work of Swinburne. Indeed, Maxwell considers that Sappho heavily influences Swinburne's 'poetic feminization' and poetics[32]:

> In [Swinburne's] poetry, she is conspicuously the dominant image of the poet, being central to poems such as 'Anactoria,' 'Sapphics' and 'On the Cliffs' which are rich in quotation of her work. Swinburne's Sappho is also quite explicitly, unlike Tennyson's, a lesbian—one of the first open celebrations of lesbianism in English poetry since Donne's "Sappho to Philaenis." This 'shocking' innovation was partly responsible for Alfred Austin's characterisation of Swinburne as an "improper" feminine poet as opposed to Tennyson who was a "proper" one.

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[28] David Moriarty, '"Michael Field" and Their Male Critics,' in *Nineteenth Century Women Writers of the English Speaking World* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp.121-42 (p.124).
[29] Richard Dellamora, *Apocalyptic Overtures* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1994), p.50.
[30] De Jean, p.225.
[31] Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, p.77.
[32] Building on the Bloomian notion of 'anxiety of influence,' Maxwell sees 'feminisation for male poets not so much as an affect of localised cultural influences, but implicit to the poetic tradition which dates from Milton's construction of himself as an inspired bard,'p.3. See Maxwell's *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne* for further discussion.

> While Swinburne's treatment of Sappho may not please some modern tastes, the impact of these poems on the female Modernists…was considerable.[33]

In other words, 'Swinburne's Sapphism is not simply the product of individual psychology or socio-cultural crisis but is a rich response to a tradition of male poets writing after Milton.'[34] Similarly, Prins suggests that, 'the Sapphic body emerges in Swinburne's poetry as a rhythmicized, eroticized form: less a "male lesbian body" than an embodiment of the rhythm of eros itself.'[35] Furthermore, as Prins points out, 'Sappho circulated as proper name for the "Poetess" in Victorian women's verse. Popular poetesses…were identified with a Sapphic persona that seemed to personify poetry written for the "personal" expression of "feminine" sentiment.'[36] Inspired by the feminized verses of Swinburne, and intrigued by the notion of the 'poetess,' I suggest that Michael Field return to the Lesbian lyric in order to explore women's experiences of eros.[37]

Said to have been inspired by Henry Thornton Wharton's (proactively same-sex) translation of the Sapphic fragments, *Long Ago* is, in fact, influenced by a variety of writers, including contemporary figures like Swinburne and Robert Browning. Indeed, Bradley and Cooper appealed to Browning to 'censure' their lyrics, and to indicate any lack of scholarship on their part. Bradley requested of Browning to, 'please write freely on the opposite leaf anything that occurs to you of censure, suggestion, or comment, especially pointing out any failure in Greek directness & simplicity.'[38] Browning's erudition had a significant part to play in the final version of *Long Ago*, as O'Gorman has demonstrated.[39] In addition, as O'Gorman has recently observed, 'it is in negotiation with Swinburne that the individuality of Michael Field's position is, in part, articulated.'[40] By

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[33] Maxwell, p.38.
[34] Maxwell, p.46.
[35] Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, p.112-113. Like Maxwell, Prins reads Swinburne's 'Sapphic sublime' as part of a wider thesis concerning the place of Sappho with regard to the gendering of lyric.
[36] Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, p.174.
[37] Ruth Vanita also suggests that 'Sapphic writers did not operate within a tradition of their own, but were integrated with and constitutive of mainstream traditions. Sapphic love was not always silenced, invisibilized, or exoticized by the English literary imagination but was rather one of its central components.' See Vanita, p.1.
[38] Undated letter from Bradley to Browning (early 1887), Add. Ms. 45851.
[39] Francis O'Gorman, 'Browning's Manuscript Revisions to Michael Field's *Long Ago* (1889),' *Browning Society Notes* 25 (1998): 38-44.
[40] O'Gorman, 'Michael Field and Sapphic Fame: "My Dark-Leaved Laurels Will Endure."' *Victorian Literature and Culture* 34 (2006), 649-661(p.650).

appropriating Sappho's voice, O' Gorman suggests that, Bradley and Cooper 'commit a poetic sleight of hand, creating out of their fertile minds an imagined, faked version of Sappho's words.'[41] What is more, the fertile minds of Bradley and Cooper can be seen to combine Ovidian myths in a Sapphic context, to create a self-consciously learned, yet artificial world, in which to explore *eros*.

Bradley and Cooper's acute observations concerning the power of eros in relation to women are undoubtedly important. Of further significance is that, as in *Bellerophôn* and *Callirhoë*, Bradley and Cooper's artistic vision is remarkably inclusive. O'Gorman posits that *Long Ago* 'celebrates female creativity, quietly linking lyricism with a form of bisexual consciousness.'[42] For Emma Donoghue, 'this sophisticated sequence of sixty-eight poems deals with many different passions, overlapping along a spectrum of sexuality, much like Sappho's own work.'[43] *Long Ago* is a difficult, often contradictory volume in which Bradley and Cooper explore the varieties and the paradoxes of passion. Moreover, this volume of erotic lyrics can be seen as Bradley and Cooper's attempt to seduce their readers, in the style of the poet-lover-teacher, Sappho.

The variety of sexualities in *Long Ago* is matched by varying degrees of desire. This is significant as for the Greeks desire was nuanced. In *Cratylus* (420a), for example, Plato describes the alternative forms of desire. He tells us that *himeros* describes the desire for a partner who is present; a desire which can, therefore, be satisfied. *Pothos*, on the other hand, is the desire for what is absent, or lost. This kind of desire causes suffering as it can never be fulfilled. We also know from Hesiod that *Anteros*, the brother of *Eros,* represents mutual desire between lovers. In the original Sapphic fragments, Sappho employs the compound adjective of *glukupikron,* to describe the 'sweetbitter' nature of eros. This contradictory form of desire, as 'sweetbitter' so clearly implies, is both pleasurable and dreadful. Love and hate can be seen to be united within erotic desire. Eros and the emotional paradoxes generated by erotic passion are examined from a variety of perspectives in Bradley and Cooper's volume. Ultimately, Eros (pursued with Dionysian enthusiasm) is the dominant god, and religion, of *Long Ago*.

Sexual and textual indeterminacy define *Long Ago*. Yet, it is Sappho's longing for the beautiful fisherman Phaon, which forms the backbone of the internal narrative of the

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[41] O'Gorman, 'Michael Field and Sapphic Fame,' p.656.
[42] O'Gorman, 'Michael Field and Sapphic Fame,' p.650.
[43] Donoghue, p.47.

volume. Sappho's tormented passion for Phaon is, however, a purely Ovidian invention. Phaon does not appear as a character, nor is he alluded to in any of the original Sapphic fragments. The story of Sappho's intense passion and subsequent bitterness toward Phaon is explored by Ovid in his epistolic volume, *Heroides*.[44] Harold Isbell describes the epistle from 'Sappho to Phaon' as a 'complaint.'[45] Ovid tells us that Sappho has been seduced by the young Phaon and subsequently abandoned. As Isbell suggests, in his absence Phaon has become something of an obsession for Sappho. Indeed, 'Phaon permeates her imagination so thoroughly that her dreams become intensely erotic.'[46] Ovid describes Sappho's erotic dreams as follows:

> There, in my dreams, I find you, though you
> are far away; the joys of sleep are too short.
> So often, it seems, I press the weight
> of my neck against your arms and so often
> do I place my arms beneath your neck.
> I know the kisses, the tongue's caresses which
> once you enjoyed giving and getting.
> It seems I fondle you while uttering words
> that are near the truth of wakefulness
> and my sensation is guarded by my lips.

Sappho's lips are permanently guarded, as she reveals that along with Phaon's desertion, her lyrical muse has also forsaken her. Prins suggests that Sappho's epistle to Phaon is in fact 'a suicide letter,' that 'this Sapphic signature is a postscript to the Sapphic songs she once sang, a P.S. placed at the beginning of the letter and prescribing the end of Sappho as lyric poet.'[47]

Michael Field begin their Sapphic volume at the end, as it were, with a strong reference to Sappho, as represented in *Heroides*. There are a number of similarities between Ovid's epistle and poems from *Long Ago*. Bradley and Cooper are, however, less bold in their description of Sappho's heterosexual passion:

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[44] De Jean provides a comprehensive reading of Ovid's epistle in *Fictions of Sappho,* especially pp.60-78.
[45] See Isbell's brief introduction to "Sappho to Phaon" in Ovid's *Heroides*, translated and introduced by Harold Isbell (London: Penguin, 1990, 2004), p.131. Isbell's translation will be used throughout.
[46] Ovid, *Heroides*, p.132.
[47] Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, p.177.

II
'Οφθάλμοιζ δέ μέλαιζ νύκτοζ άωροζ

COME, dark eyed Sleep, thou child of Night,
Give me thy dreams, thy lies;
Lead through the horny portal white
The pleasure day denies.

O bring the kiss I could not take
From lips that would not give;
Bring me the heart I could not break,
The bliss for which I live.

I care not if I slumber blest
By fond delusion; nay,
Put me on Phaon's lips to rest,
And cheat the cruel day! (p.4)

What this lyric lacks, in comparison with that of Ovid, is the sense of lived experience. Michael Field's Sappho does not describe the touch and feel of Phaon. Unlike the *Heroides*, there is in fact no evidence in *Long Ago* that Sappho and Phaon have been lovers. Phaon, it seems, 'would not give' Sappho the pleasure she so desires. And so she lives out her fantasy in her dreams. A dreaming Sappho can 'take' the kisses and the sexual pleasure that Phaon so persistently denies. This form of eroticism is more *pothos* than *himeros*, as Sappho longs for that which she cannot have. Her desire is configured in terms of lack. Yet, Sappho's lyrical ability allows her to transform absence into substance.

Auto-erotic fantasy is not, however, without its darker side. In poem 'XXXII,' Sappho demonstrates that her pleasurable fantasies are matched by much more painful visions. Unable to contain the darker elements of eros, Sappho's sexual frustration spills out into metaphoric action:

NOT for revenge!— one shaft alone
From Sappho's hand, in ire, hath flown;
Love smote: the arrow from my heart
I drew, and bent the string
For Phaon's breast; he felt no smart,
With me remains the sting;
And I am weaponless, apart
From that too wildly wasted dart. (p.51)

Sappho's desire for Phaon remains unrequited. As a result, her 'longing' is ever more intense and her pain even more acute. Despite herself, Sappho's sense of 'ire' causes her to strike out against her beloved, in the hope that he will be forced to feel the pain and the intensity of her passion. But as a mortal, her erotic arrows fail to penetrate Phaon's breast. She is impotent in the face of her desire. This truncated poem therefore stands as a stark reminder of the violence of *eros* and the difficulty of containing violent emotion within lyric form.[48] Carson explains that desire 'is neither inhabitant nor ally of the desirer. Foreign to her will, it forces itself irresistibly upon her from without. Eros is an enemy. Its bitterness must be the taste of enmity.'[49]

However, when love and pleasure are reciprocated, there is no sense of harm. Chris White observes that in poem 'XXXIII,' 'Michael Field contrast heterosexual and lesbian experience and desire, where the former is changeable and unstable, the latter pain-free, constant and completely fulfilling.'[50] There is, indeed, a marked lack of pain in Sappho's description of her relationship with her maids:

> Maids, not to you my mind doth change;
> Men I defy, allure, estrange,
> Prostrate, make bond or free:
> Soft as the stream beneath the plane
> To you I sing my love's refrain;
> Between us is no thought of pain,
> Peril, satiety. (p.52)

Whilst, there is a suggestion of violence in Sappho's description of her heterosexual encounters, Bradley and Cooper's representation of female same-sex desire is progressively affirmative. However, there is no reification of same-sex relationships in *Long Ago*. Where male writers employed the Greek model of *pederastia* as a means of discussing and defending male homosexuality, Bradley and Cooper stop short of idealizing same-sex love between women in overtly transcendental terms. As Maynard observes, the late-Victorian renaissance of the Greek pederastic ideal proposed 'a manly pedagogic idea of love based on a somewhat teasing repression of the physical side of

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[48] It should be remembered that the act of firing even an Erotic dart is, fundamentally, brutal and injurious.
[49] Carson, p.4.
[50] White, 'The One Woman (in virgin haunts of poesie): Michael Field's Sapphic symbolism' in *Volcanoes and Pearl Divers*, ed. Suzanne Raitt (London: Onlywoman Press, 1995), p.80

Greek love.'[51] Bradley and Cooper display little interest in renouncing the physical side of love.[52]

Sappho's erotic desires toward the maidens of Lesbos are both constant and requited. Sappho need not pine for what she does not lack. Consequently, the violent intensity of eros is depleted. More in tune with *Anteros* than *Eros*, this collective form of love between women does not cause pain or peril. Unlike the hierarchical *erastes/eronomos* model of *pederastia*, there is, it seems, no power imbalance in Sappho's (pedagogical) relationship with her maids.[53] The experienced poet may therefore enjoy the benefits of mutual love and adoration:

> When injuries my spirit bruise,
> Allaying virtue ye infuse
> With unobtrusive skill:
> And if care frets ye come to me
> As fresh as nymph from stream or tree,
> And with your soft vitality
> My weary bosom fill. (p.52-53)

Far from being (Swinburnian) agents of (moral) degradation, the Lesbian maidens effuse 'virtue' in their love-making. Sappho's bosom and mind are simultaneously revitalized as the love of her maids is as spiritual as it is sensual. The virtue of the maids is very different from the *virtus* demanded of male citizens. Unlike in *Callirhoë,* in the Lesbian community of *Long Ago*, there is simply no conflict between the fulfillment of physical desires and the well-being of the community, and the sanctity of the spirit.

Moreover, by consistently comparing the Lesbian maidens with the beautiful landscape, Bradley and Cooper underline the 'naturalness' of the Lesbians' desires. Indeed, eros, far from being socially controlled, is in *Long Ago* a natural law unto itself. Bradley and Cooper harmonize sexual desire with the rhythms and energies of the Natural world. Take, for instance, lyric 'III':

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[51] Maynard, p.549.
[52] White's observation that there is a heavy emphasis on the notion of 'virginity' in *Long Ago*, does not, I think, exclude the possibility of same-sex sexual experiences. See White, 'The One Woman (in virgin haunts of poesie): Michael Field's Sapphic symbolism.'
[53] According to Dover, Sapphism differs from the pederastic model in that it replaces the 'usual distinction between a dominant and subordinate partner' with 'a marked degree of mutual eros.' See Kenneth Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London: Duckworth, 1978), p.177.

Oh, not the honey, nor the bee!
Yet who can drain the flowers
As I? Less mad, Persephone
Spoiled the Sicilian bowers
Than I for scent and splendour rove
The rosy oleander grove,
Or lost in myrtle nook unveil
Thoughts that make Aphrodite pale.

Honey nor bee! The tingling quest
Must that too be denied?
Deep in thy bosom I would rest,
O golden blossom wide!
O poppy-wreath, O violet-crown,
I fling your fiery circlets down;
The joys o'er which bees murmur deep
Your Sappho's senses may not steep.

Honey! Clear, soothing, nectarous, sweet,
On which my heart would feed,
Give me, O Love, the golden meat,
And stay my life's long greed—
The food in which the gods delight
That glistens tempting in my sight!
Phaon, thy lips withhold from me
The bliss of honey and of bee. (p.5-6)

Entirely in keeping with their wider Dionysiac aesthetic, Eros is re-presented as a chthonic god; desire is linked with the pulsations of the earth and the fertility of the seasons. Moreover, Sappho, the creative/fertile figure par excellence, sees herself as inextricably linked with this process: 'who can drain the flowers/ As I?' This primordial rhythm is also reflected in the songs of Sappho. Lyric 'III,' for example, alternates a long line followed by a shorter line, indicating a primal ebb and flow, or 'in and out' rhythm. The final line, not coincidentally, climaxes with the 'bliss of honey and of bee.'

The 'glistening' 'golden meat' of the beehive (and one is tempted to say, Lesbian maidens) is represented as ambrosia, by the lust-struck Sappho. Partaking of this natural 'food,' one will be not only be physically energized, but also spiritually galvanized.[54]

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[54] It is interesting to compare Michael Field's treatment of what Louis calls 'the politics of food' with that of Swinburne and Tennyson. As Louis points out, in 'At Eleusis,' 'revolting against the male gods' homosocial conspiracy, Demeter resorts to a politics of food that at once separates her utterly from the Olympians and avenges her loss.' Whereas in 'Demeter and Persephone' (1889), Tennyson 'imbues the anti-Olympian topos with a visceral revulsion.' The gods of *Long Ago* are, with the exception of Aphrodite,

Yet, as one might expect where primordial forces are involved, there is a deeply disturbing undercurrent to this intensely erotic poem. Comparing Sappho's 'mad' and greedy passion with that of Hades' lust for Persephone, Bradley and Cooper again hint at the dangers of uncontrolled desire. If we remember, Persephone is pursued through the 'Sicilian bowers' by the love-struck Hades.[55] Hades catches Persephone, kidnaps her and takes her to the Underworld, where he rapes, then marries her. The comparison between Sappho's pursuit of Phaon and that of Hades for Persephone is intended to show the fierce compulsion of eros. But, as I will discuss in more detail later, the pursuit and capture of the beloved does not always end happily for the lover.

Bradley and Cooper suggest in poem 'XXVI,' that for the virgin maids of Sappho's company, 'No thought of Eros doth appal/ Their cheeks; their strong, clear eyes let fall/ No tears.' That is not to say that same-sex love, as represented in *Long Ago*, is 'pain-free' and 'completely fulfilling.' A number of lyrics in fact reveal how Sappho's fierce passion for some of her female companions makes her susceptible to ignoble sentiments. In poem 'VII,' for example, a poisonously jealous Sappho's reveals her physical revulsion toward the maiden, Mnasidica: 'Whose very shadow on the wall/ Repulses me, and when I hear/ Her rude, slow step I shake with fear.' Sappho continues: 'For, oh, she must not ever dare/ To leave her flabby shoulder bare!' In lust with Mnasidica's partner, Gyrinna, Sappho's inappropriately vicious remarks not only expose the cruelty of *eros*, but the potentially divisive effect of her desires. As Carson points out, 'the word 'jealousy' comes from Greek *zēlos* meaning 'zeal' or 'fervent pursuit.' It is a hot and corrosive spiritual motion arising in fear and fed on resentment...this is an emotion concerned with placement and displacement.'[56] In this entirely female love-triangle, Sappho considers 'displacing' Mnasidica and installing herself in Gyrinna's affections, despite the pain that this may cause to all parties. Eros, unlike *himeros* or *anteros*, is not only painful, but selfish.

In lyric 'XIV' we are given a glimpse of a fretful and possessive Sappho. The poet demands that her lover Atthis must not 'flutter from my side/ An instant, lest I feel the dread,/ Atthis, the immanence of death.' Rather like Coresus' desire for Callirhoë,

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pre-Olympian and, therefore, Sappho has no qualms about 'breaking bread' with the gods. See Louis, p.346.

[55] In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells us that Venus instructs Cupid to 'shoot your speedy arrows' into the heart of Pluto/Hades (V., 367).

Sappho's desire for Atthis is controlling. However, unlike Coresus, Sappho's eroticism is combined with her fear of death:

> Atthis, my darling, thou did'st stray
> A few feet to the rushy bed,
> When a great fear and passion shook
> My heart lest haply you wert dead;
> It grew so still about the brook,
> As is a soul were drawn away. (p.22)

Bataille observes that, 'sexual turbulence obviously does not bring us to tears, but it always disturbs us, sometimes shatters us, and one of two things ensues: either it makes us laugh, or else it impels us to the violence of an embrace.'[57] Sappho's 'great fear,' combined as it is with her passion, leads her to an orgasmic embrace with Atthis. Death is postponed and, in its place a 'little death' is gratefully enjoyed. Yet, in reaching for a desired object that is outside and beyond herself, Sappho should consider the limits of the self. Sappho's desire for Atthis, as intense as it is, cannot prevent the potential loss of the beloved. Indeed, poem 'XXV' tells us that even Aphrodite lacks the power to recall her great love, Adonis, from Hades. Eros, quite rightly, has limits. Sappho, however, is not interested in boundaries of any kind: 'My darling! Nay, our very breath/ Nor light nor darkness shall divide.' In failing to acknowledge the boundaries of eros, Sappho's erotic desire has the potential to harm.

It is useful to view this poem alongside other nineteenth century poems in which sex and death intersect. As Regina Barreca observes, 'the pleasures of death, in contrast to the pleasures of sex, have long been the focus for all forms of Victorian literature, from the intricate fugues of Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' to the stunningly obvious melodrama of the Victorian stage.'[58] In a number of narratives, as Barreca notes, the desire for sex with the Other, might emerge as the desire for the death of the Other. For instance, Bronfen suggests that a number of male writers find 'pleasure' in death by configuring the dead beloved as Muse: 'death transforms the body of a woman into the source of poetic inspiration precisely because it creates and gives corporeality to a loss or

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[56] Carson, p.14.
[57] Bataille, *The Tears of Eros* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1961, 1989), p.33.
[58] See Regina Barreca's introduction, 'Coming and Going in Victorian Literature,' in *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature*, ed., Regina Barreca (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1990), pp1-8 (p.2).

absence.'[59] Despite the fact that loss, in its many guises—loss of youth, loss of beauty, loss of love, loss of hope, loss of virginity, loss of friendship, loss of selfhood, loss of song—is one of the dominant themes of the volume, there is no suggestion in *Long Ago* that the lover who cannot possess the beloved will think of killing her, into art, or otherwise. Nor is there the expectation, as outlined by writers like Coventry Patmore, that, freed from the mortal coil, Atthis and Sappho will move onto ever greater sexual ecstasy in the next life. In fact death is seen as a barrier and not a prelude to sexual fulfillment. That is not to say that death is not tantalizingly inspirational to Bradley and Cooper's Sappho.

Plato's *Phaedrus* is a text in which lovers and letters intersect. Poem 'XIV' can be read on a similar level. From their letters and diaries, we know that Katharine often referred to Edith as Atthis. Consequently, one may interpret the intense feelings of the older, lyric poet toward her young lover in poem 'XIV,' as an expression of the desire between Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper. In their journal Edith recorded:

> I am moved to read to Francis (I believe it is only to him I could read what is so thrilling and sacred to my heart) I am moved to read Michael's poems to me… "The dear temptation of her face" with "Atthis, my darling" of *Long Ago* added. I am moved to show him my triumph & joy in this lovely praise…I also let my Beloved realise what her poet's gift has been to me—her poet-lover's gift…It is Paradise between us. When we're together eternally our spirits will be interpenetrated with our love & our Art under the benison of the vision of God.[60]

The issue of Bradley and Cooper's literary collaboration has been elaborated upon elsewhere, but what is of interest in terms of *Long Ago* is what Prins calls the 'eroticized textual mediation' between the dual authors.[61] In the above extract Edith describes a triangulation of desire, in which writing and religion not only expresses but confirms Bradley and Cooper's love for each other. Interestingly, Edith also considers 'Atthis, my darling' as representing her 'triumph' and joy. But, triumph over what? Is she referring to her erotic conquest of Katharine, or their shared poetic triumph? Whatever she may, or may not have meant, Edith recognised Katharine's ability to convey the intensity of her desire in poetry.

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[59] Elisabeth Bronfen, 'Dialogue with the Dead: the Deceased Beloved as Muse' in *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature* (see Barreca above), pp241-259 (p.242-3).
[60] Add. Ms. 46803. Father Francis was Edith's confessor in her final years.

Throughout the text we see repeated attempts to contain *eros* through religious/ritualistic ceremonies. In lyric 'XLVI,' Bradley and Cooper imagine a marriage ceremony. Alongside the bridegroom stands his sister, Sappho, who admonishes the young man for his trepidation: '" Fool, faint not thou!" I laughed in blame/ Of Larichus, pale in the flame/ Of Hymen's torches.' From what Sappho has told us about eros, Larichus has every reason to look pale. In fact, it is not Larichus who needs persuading to embrace the contradictory passions of love:

> "Faint not"—the poet must dare all;
> Me no experience shall appal,
> No pang that can make shrill my song:
> Though Atthis, hateful, flit
> From my fond arms, and by
> Andromeda dare sit,
> I will not let my strong
> Heart fail, will bear the wrong,
> With piercing accents for Adonis cry,
> Or thrice on perished Timas vainly call. (p.75)

Bradley and Cooper directly link eros with poetic construction. Acknowledging that the complex dynamics of eros enrich her song, Sappho is prepared to embrace erotic experience for all that it is worth:

> "Faint not," I said. Would'st thou be great,
> Thou must with every shock vibrate
> That life can bring thee; seek and yearn;
> Feel in thyself the stroke
> Of love, although it rive
> As mountain-wind an oak;
> Let jealous passion burn
> If Rhodope must turn
> To other love; and laugh that age should strive
> The adours of thy bosom to abate. (p.75)

Bradley and Cooper's Sappho appears to value the positive changes in the self, engendered by eros: 'I will not let my strong/ Heart fail, will bear the wrong.' Indeed, if she wants to achieve her ambition to be a 'great' poet, Sappho knows that she must learn to lovingly express the pains as well as the pleasures of eros.

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[61] Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, p.76.

As in the original Sapphic lyric, 'Hymn to Aphrodite,' Bradley and Cooper note the physical sensations of eros. Sappho trembles like a 'vibrating poplar' in the wind and her breath 'comes sharp' as she 'were nigh to death' upon hearing the voice of Anactoria. Not as strong as Swinburne's sado-masochistic lyrics, Bradley and Cooper nevertheless link Sappho's physical reactions with her poetic sensibility. Sappho not only describes the sensations of eros in terms of the natural environment, she appears to react to the environment, as if she were in love: I feel my senses swoon,/ Or quicken with delight/ At nature's simplest boon.' Like the force of Nature, in Bradley and Cooper's formulation *eros* can be artistically generative. There is also another affirmative aspect to Sappho's fierce eroticism. The jealous passion that Sappho holds for previous lovers, such as Atthis and Anactoria, is as powerful as her passion for Phaon. In other words, Sappho's jealousy is a remarkable statement of equality. Love and passion between women is just as strong, and as potentially destructive, as heterosexual desire. There is no erotic hierarchy here.

Sappho's observational skills are such that, aside from her expert self-analysis, she can also detect the symptoms of eros in others. In the unusual lyric 'XXVIII,' Sappho imagines herself as both the object and subject of desire:

LOVE, fatal creature, bitter-sweet,
For my Alcaeus I entreat.
Should I not plead? To wasting fires
A secret prey I live,
Yet, Eros, that which he desires
I cannot give.

Who shall deliver him? Lo, I,
For love of whom he soon will die,
Weep through the starry night oppressed
That he should love in vain.
Ah, can another mortal breast
Learn Sappho's pain! (p.46)

In this case, Sappho is untouched by the arrows of Eros. As a result, she is unable to return Alcaeus' passion. Nevertheless, Sappho's capacity for intense feeling allows her to identify with the troubled lover, if only to share the pathos of the situation.

Alcaeus, another ancient lyric poet and elder contemporary of Sappho, was famous for his hymns, political songs, drinking songs, and love songs. Only a few

incomplete fragments of his poetry remain.[62] According to Aristotle, Sappho and Alcaeus exchanged poems.[63] But in Michael Field's vision, Alcaeus' poetry seems to lack the persuasive power, which reflects his experience of erotic desire:

> To him, O heavenly Muses, come!
> He cannot live if he be dumb.
> Leave me awhile. O let him feel
> His heart set free in song;
> Hasten, for ye alone can heal
> A lover's wrong. (p.47)

It seems that if one is able to express the pain of eros in song, one may be freed from its effects. But if one has no intellectual or creative outlet for such intense feelings, eros will work its destructive power.[64]

Just as the previous poem highlights the generative aspects of eros, lyric 'LXIII,' exposes the more damaging side of eroticism. Far from generating song, Sappho, in the grip of eros, finds her lyrical ability inhibited:

> O whilom tireless voice, why art thou dumb?
> To-day I stood
> Watching the Maenads come
> From a dark fissure in the ilex-wood
> Forth to the golden poplars and the light;
> My tingling senses leapt to join that concourse bright.
>
> Passed is the crowd, passed with his buoyant flute
> The Evian King:
> My plectrum stiff is mute
> Of beauty, of the halcyon's nest, of spring;
> Though deep within a vital madness teems,
> And I am tossed with fierce, disjointed, wizard dreams.
>
> Apollo, Dionysus passes by,
> Adonis wakes,
> Zephyr and Chloris sigh:
> To me, alas, my lyre no music makes,

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[62] Some of the fragments of Alcaeus poetry have in fact been attributed to Sappho and vice versa. See Jane Macintosh Snyder's study, *Lesbian Desire in the Lyrics of Sappho* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[63] Aristotle quotes an exchange between Sappho and Alcaeus, as part of his discussion on the nature of virtue and shame, *Rhetoric* (I..9).

[64] One can't help but feel that this poem may reflect. to some degree, the relationship between Katharine Bradley and her cousin Francis Brooks.

> Though tortured, fluttering toward the strings I reach,
> Mad as for Anactoria's lovely laugh and speech.
> (p.116-117)

Inspired by nature and by the presence of Dionysus and his enthusiastic Maenads, Sappho reaches toward her lyre. But, she tells us, no lyrics are forthcoming. The intensity of unrequited eros, like the undiluted wine of Dionysus, is driving Sappho to distraction. Lyric poetry, which subjugates emotion into form, cannot be written when the singer is unable to organize her chaotic feelings. Sappho implores Apollo, and the order he represents to return to her: 'To thy chariot get,/ Glorious arise as on thy day of birth,/ And spread illuminating order through the earth.' Somehow, Sappho must embrace the inspirational energy of Dionysian passion and the order of Apollo. Without these two forces working in synthesis within her, Sappho insists (within the limits of a perfectly controlled lyric) that lyric song is impossible. Apollo, the god of poetry, clearly responds to Sappho's prayer, as the lyric concludes: 'I heard along/ My lyre the journeying tumult of an unbreathed song.' Calm is, temporarily, restored to Sappho's frenetically creative, erotically charged mind.

Sapphic Poetics and Ovidian Transformations

Any sense of tranquillity is, however, only temporary in *Long Ago*. Punctuated throughout the volume are a number of unusually disturbing lyrics, based on myths traditionally found outside of the Sapphic corpus. Inspired, I suggest, by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, these dark and disconcerting lyrics can be seen to stand out from the volume as a whole, in terms of both subject and content. As opposed to the often playful, seductive poems of Sappho, the Ovidian poems represent mythological narratives of pursuit, rape and/or violent violation. Such lyrics provide a morally complex dynamic of assault and resistance.[65] In the Ovid-inspired lyrics, Bradley and Cooper demonstrate the corruption of eros by power, rather than the power of eros. Furthermore, Bradley and Cooper emphasize the Ovidian theme of metamorphosis in these lyrics. Eros changes the characters of *Long Ago*, whether they will it, or not.

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[65]Carson tells us that 'pursuit and flight are a topos of Greek erotic poetry and iconography from the archaic period onward.' Many ancient vase paintings, as Carson points out, represent the moment when the beloved turns and runs, rather than the unification of the lovers. See Carson, p19-.20.

There are, however, two exceptions to the theme of transformation in *Long Ago*; the longevity of literary fame and the constancy of the soul. Sappho repeatedly tells us that her fame will continue and that, despite her age and experience, she feels as intensely as ever: 'My dark-leaved laurels will endure,/ And I shall walk in grandeur till my death.'[66] Literary fame and the constancy of the soul were also concerns for Ovid. Somewhat paradoxically, Ovid concludes the *Metamorphoses* with the lines: 'If truth at all/ Is stablished by poetic prophecy,/ My fame shall live to all eternity.' During the nineteenth century, however, Ovid's reputation (as opposed to that of Sappho) was far less assured than he would have liked.

As Norman Vance points out, part of the difficulty in assessing the significance of Ovid in the nineteenth century is that he is so often viewed through the work of others. As a result, 'his influence is nearly always mediated, sometimes by old paintings on Ovidian subjects such as Polidoro da Caravaggio's *Andromeda* which haunted the young Browning or Piero di Cosimo's *Death of Procris* which inspired a poem by Austin Dobson.'[67] Furthermore, Vance suggests that, 'the poetry and the poet drifted apart in popular awareness. Ovid the rake, the sophisticated tactician of love's siege-warfare, tended to be separated from Ovid the highly convenient if barely acknowledged source of decorative and sometimes disturbing myths and legends.' This development 'had the curious and unfortunate effect of making Ovid simultaneously obnoxious as a personality and almost invisible as a poet.'[68]

Despite the general Victorian view of Ovid as a 'degenerate in a degenerate age,' Vance notes the influence of Ovid in the work of Leighton, Tennyson, Browning, George Sandys and George Meredith amongst others.[69] Sarah Annes Brown also suggests that Ovid was a significant literary precursor in the nineteenth century, inspiring both Swinburne and Robert Browning's *Ring and the Book*.[70] As we know, Browning had a particularly important role in the development of *Long Ago*. Indeed, in 1885, Cooper

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[66] For a good reading of the theme of literary fame in *Long Ago* see O'Gorman, 'Michael Field and Sapphic Fame.'

[67] Norman Vance, 'Ovid and the Nineteenth Century' in *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle-Ages to the Twentieth Century,* ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.215. For a more general analysis of the impact of Roman culture and literature in the nineteenth century see Vance's *The Victorians and Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

[68] Vance, 'Ovid and the Nineteenth Century,' p.216.

[69] Vance, 'Ovid and the Nineteenth Century,' p.216.

[70] See Sarah Annes Brown's *The Metamorphosis of Ovid: From Chaucer to Ted Hughes* (London: Duckworth, 1999).

asked Browning to recommend a 'good work on Roman mythology' that would 'give us scraps of curious knowledge and natural allusion.'[71] It may, therefore, be the case that Browning, indirectly or otherwise, influenced the more Ovid-inspired poems in *Long Ago*. Between writing *Callirhoë* and *Long Ago,* Bradley and Cooper worked on Roman dramas, which they researched reading writers like Catallus, Livy and Plutarch. Surely Ovid must have also featured on their reading lists? Alternatively, the allusions to Ovid may be attributed to Edith's preference for the Latin poets and her growing influence over the collaborative productions of 'Michael Field.'

Bradley and Cooper's fragmentary appropriation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* does not just enrich and expand *Long Ago.* Their allusions to Ovidian episodes of sexual violence complicate the volume, in terms of the ethics and politics of representation. For instance, Curran notes that there are fifty or so occurrences of forcible rape, attempted rape, or sexual extortion hardly distinguishable from rape' in the *Metamorphoses.*[72] According to Curran, Ovid's 'fascination with the experience of women and their behaviour and his passion for infinite variation on a theme combine now to produce a survey of women and rape from manifold points of view.'[73] As Curran observes, 'offhand allusions to rapes are reminders that, in the world of the *Metamorphoses*, whatever else is going on in the foreground, rape is always present or potential in the background.'[74] Michael Field's Sappho does not shy away from this most provocative of themes. Astonishingly, Bradley and Cooper appear to replicate, albeit to a lesser extent, Ovid's 'survey' of rape in *Long Ago*. One might therefore suggest that Bradley and Cooper, in the guise of 'Michael Field,' too readily identify with Ovid's tales of male domination and female exploitation. On the other hand, and in complete contradistinction to many late-nineteenth century formulations of desire and sexuality, Bradley and Cooper can be seen to represent male figures as the harbingers of degradation.

In *Long Ago* many of the mythological rapes are described or contextualized by Sappho, rather than a narrator (as in Ovid). In poems 'X' and 'XII' for example, the beautiful birds which flutter through the landscape of Lesbos are seen by Sappho in decidedly sinister terms. The mythological subject of poems 'X' and 'XII' is the highly

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[71] Extract from a letter from Edith to Browning dated July 20th, 1885. Add. Ms. 45851. Bradley and Cooper were working on their 'Tarquinian Eros' *Brutus Ultor* at the time.
[72] Leo C. Curran, 'Rape and Rape Victims in the Metamorphoses' in *Arethusa* 11 (1978), 213-241 (p.214).
[73] Curran, p.214.

disturbing tale of Procne and Philomela. As we will see, the flight and song of birds become a prelude to a tale of rape and bloodshed, in which nobody's identity, including that of Sappho, is secure.

Lyric 'X' is based on the original Sapphic fragment 135, and on Wharton's fragment 88. The myth was developed by Sophocles in his *Tereus*, from which most of the extant versions of the myth are thought to have derived. In due diligent detail Ovid relates all of the well-rehearsed points of Philomela's abduction, rape and mutilation at the hands of her brother-in-law, in Book VI of the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid also recalls the murder of Tereus' son, Itys, by Procne and Philomela.[75] The tragic tale concludes when Tereus is transformed into a hoopoe, and the women are metamorphosed into a swallow and a nightingale.[76]

Ovid suggests that Tereus' erotic crisis is such that there was 'nothing he would not do' to gratify his lust for Philomela, as 'passion drove unreined.' In other words, Ovid cites eros as the primary cause for this most gruesome of myths. As Segal suggests, Ovid demonstrates that the rape 'has its origin in lust but soon becomes an attempt to control and degrade the victim.'[77] Bradley and Cooper carefully allude to the violence of the story, but perhaps not in the way in which we might expect:

> Ah, Procne, wherefore dost thou weary me?
> Thus flitting out and flitting in,
> Thou show'st the restlessness of one love-sighted:
> And yet, Pandion's daughter, thou did'st win
> Thy Tereus. Though he loved too well
> Dumb Philomel,
> Tease not the air with this tumultuous wing!
> Hast thou no passion for unbosoming?
> Such misery
> Befits the breast that love hath ne'er delighted;
> Thou to thy Thracian boy wert once united…
> Ah, lovely Procne, wherefore weary me? (p.16)

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[74] Curran, p.217.
[75] The mutilated body of the innocent boy is served to his father in a stew. On realizing his act of incestuous cannibalism, Tereus tries to murder the sisters before the gods intervene.
[76] According to tradition, it is Procne who is transformed into the singing nightingale and the mutilated Philomela into a swallow, but this convention is reversed in later Roman literature. In the English tradition, Philomela is almost always depicted as the sorrowful nightingale.
[77] Charles Segal, 'Philomela's Web and the Pleasures of the Text: Reader and Violence in the *Metemorphoses* of Ovid' in *Modern Critical Theory and Classical Literature*, ed. I.J.F. De Jong & J.P. Sullivan (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), pp.257-280 (p.259).

A somewhat spiteful Sappho seems to deliberately misinterpret the myth, in order to attribute Procne with the 'restlessness of one love-sighted.' Procne was married to Tereus, but not out of love; theirs was a political union.[78] Married, but hardly united, to her 'Thracian boy,' Procne's feelings toward Tereus can be seen as ambivalent, even before he raped her sister, cut out Philomela's tongue, ate his own son, and tried to kill the two women. It seems unlikely, to say the least, that the frantic movements of the bird represent Procne's desire for a reunion with Tereus.

Rather than Procne's passion, the 'tumultuous wing' of the bird reflects Sappho's inner erotic disturbance. The 'flitting out and flitting in' of the bird represents the physical sensations of eros as experienced by Sappho; her chaotic state of mind and the flutterings of her heart. The bird seems to irritate Sappho intensely, but why? Because it reminds her of the great sufferings caused in the name of eros, or because it reminds her of her own sense of unease? Sappho does not depict Tereus as a brutal and cruel rapist, or a monstrous tyrant unable to control his excessive appetites. He is simply a 'Thracian boy' who merely 'loved too well/ Dumb Philomel.' Taking mythological revisionism to the extreme, Sappho attempts to nullify the horrors of the rape with the demure euphemism of 'loved too well.' Absorbed in her own pursuit of Phaon, Sappho seems to identify with the actions of the aggressive male predator, rather than the miserable Procne. Indeed, Sappho appears to be something of an apologist for Tereus' sexual sadism. The bird is, therefore, wearisome to Sappho as she is reluctant to accept her own aggressive, libidinous feelings and the potential consequences of those feelings. In this poem Bradley and Cooper, adopting a masculinist perspective to sexual violence, appear to add to the patriarchal mythology of rape as an uncontrollable sexual impulse which must have an outlet.

In poem 'XII,' however, there is a shift in focus from the male to the female characters of the myth. Again, Bradley and Cooper take pains to establish an idyllic setting:

SPRING's messenger we hail,

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[78] For Joplin, Tereus' mythic passion deflects attention from the myth's underlying structure, of the rivalry between two kings and two cultures; Greek and barbarian. Michael Field is less concerned with the cultural context of the myth, but the issue of women as objects of exchange between men is significant. See Patricia Joplin, 'The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours,' *Stanford Literature Review* 1:1 (1984), 25-53.

The sweet-voiced nightingale;
She sings where ivy weaves
Blue berries with dark leaves.

(p.18)

If we recall Kenney's comment that, in the *Metamorphoses* the emphasis is on deception and violence, and that 'an idyllic landscape is a prelude to rape or bloodshed,' and 'nobody's identity is ever wholly secure,' then *Long Ago* can be seen to operate on a similarly treacherous level.[79] The pastoral landscape is merely a prelude to the revelation of the terrible truth behind the nightingale's song:

Then breaks the piercing note
From Philomel's wild throat,
Passion's supremest pain
That may not hope again.

Zeus sends the gracious Spring,
And must her herald sing
In kindly-bowered retreat
Only of love's defeat?

Ah, woe is me! I learn,
When light and flowers return,
Love's anguish, cark and care;
Its infinite despair

Comes back, and makes me mad,
Telling how all is glad:
Then swell the throb, the wail,
The want, O nightingale! (p.19)

The advent of spring not only recalls the sufferings of Philomela, but also the rape and abduction of Persephone. The very earth beneath Sappho's feet and the song in the air reminds her of the female casualties of unrestrained (masculine) desire. The environment, which, in other poems seems to reflect the indulgent, sensual activities of the Lesbian maidens, now seems to echo with the piercing notes of female pain. The painful, yet pleasurable song of the nightingale teaches Sappho of the 'anguish' and the 'infinite despair' of love.[80] The rape of Philomel no longer represents the thrill of the chase and

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[79] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p.xviii.
[80] Bradley and Cooper's lyric is reminiscent of Swinburne's 'Anactoria' in which he describes the 'long notes of birds/ Violently singing till the whole world sings.'

the triumphal satiation of eros, but 'love's defeat.' Sappho is forced to acknowledge that desire fulfilled by force, is no love at all.

Richlin notes that many of the women who are raped and subsequently transformed in Ovid's work, 'lose the ability to speak with a human voice; if they have been turned into animals, their efforts to speak, resulting in grunts, and their horror at this are recounted.'[81] Far from being transcendental, lust, as represented by Ovid, can be utterly dehumanizing. As Ovid recalls, Philomela's is a double rape; of her body and her ability to speak freely. Woven into the myth of Philomela is, therefore, the inhibition of women's speech, and women's ability to represent their own desires. In Ovid's version of the myth, Philomela eventually overcomes her enforced silence when she weaves a tapestry picturing Tereus raping and mutilating her. Through the aid of a servant, the tapestry reaches Procne who is herself stunned into silence by the horrific revelation before her. Joplin considers Philomela's weaving of the tapestry not only as an act of resistance, but the myth itself as an illustration of the threat of silence to women's voices, oral and textual, in European culture.[82]

Joplin also points out that, 'the attempt to suppress any evidence of an articulated women's community is a crucial, but usually invisible, aspect of these myths.'[83] It is significant that in Bradley and Cooper's poem the sound which punctuates the silence is the sound of 'Philomel's wild throat.' The previously 'dumb Philomel,' now has a 'passion for unbosoming,' and her song is persuasive. In Bradley and Cooper's poetic revision, women are able to articulate both the pleasures and dangers of eros through song. Furthermore, other women are available to interpret their words.[84] Instead of identifying with (male) sexual aggression and female degradation, Sappho is able in this second poem to find solidarity in female suffering. In this sense, one is reminded of

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[81] For an important reading of rape in the work of Ovid see Amy Richlin's 'Reading Ovid's Rapes' in *Pornography and Representation in Greece & Rome,* ed., Amy Richlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.158-179 (p.165).

[82] Joplin's important essay not only had a significant impact on the feminist re-reading of classical myth, but on women writers more generally. See Joplin, "The Voice of the Shuttle Is Ours."

[83] See Joplin's shorter, revised essay, 'Epilogue: Philomela's Loom' in *Coming to Light: American Women Poets in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Diane Middlebrook & Marilyn Yalom (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1985), pp.254 – 267 (p.260).

[84] Philomela's weaving and her metamorphosis can, of course, be equated with Bradley and Cooper's textual re-construction. For other interesting readings of Philomela see, Nancy Gutierrez's 'Philomela Strikes Back,' *Women's Studies* 16:3/4 (1989): 429-43; Elissa Marder, 'Disarticulated Voices: Feminism and Philomela,' *Hypatia* 7:2 (1992): 148-66.

Swinburne's 'Itylus' (1864), in which Swinburne elects to give voice to long-suffering Philomela.

The movement between poems 'X' and 'XII'—from identification with the perpetrator to identification with the victim—can be seen to reflect Sappho's development both as a lover and as a poet. However, the supposed metamorphosis of the women into birds cannot be seen to satisfactorily resolve the issues raised by the myth. Sappho depicts the two female actors from this myth as imprisoned, rather than liberated from their misery. Far from enjoying the freedom of birds, the constancy of the women's souls will not allow this disastrous erotic triangle to have an end: 'then swell the throb the wail, the want O nightingale!'[85] Ultimately, Bradley and Cooper intensify, rather than avoid, the suffering in this myth.[86]

In Book VI of the *Metamorphoses*, the myth of Procne and Philomela is followed by the story of Boreas. *Long Ago* also features a poem based on the god of the North wind, lyric 'XVIII.' Boreas is not, however, mentioned in any of the extant Sapphic fragments or in Wharton's text. The allusion to this myth in Bradley and Cooper's sequence of Sapphic poems is, therefore, extraneous unless we consider the influence of Ovid. The myth, as Ovid tells it, concerns Boreas' adoption of force, as a legitimate means to satiate his lust. In 'love' with Orithyia, Boreas attempts to seduce the young maid 'with words not force.' His attempts at seduction fail. Rebuked by the mortal maid, the god elects to change course: 'when fair speeches failed him, anger stormed,/ The north wind's too familiar mood at home.' Clothed in a cloud of darkness the 'ravisher' wraps the 'terrified Orithyia in his wings/ His loving tawny wings, and as he flew/ His fire was fanned and flared.' Ovid then tells us that the princess Orithyia became his wife and bore him two sons, Calais and Zeto.

For Segal, the myth of Boreas and Orithyia 'is virtually a comic mirror-image of the story of Tereus and Philomela,' except that the raped victim 'now ends up as bride and as the mother of Boreas' two sons, who, at the end go off on an all-male quest, with brilliant prospects.'[87] Curran suggests that 'there is a large measure of burlesque,

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[85] One is also reminded of Matthew Arnold's poem on the same myth, 'Philomela' (1853), in which he declares, 'Again—thou hearest!/ Eternal Passion!/ Eternal Pain!' (139).
[86] Poems 'X' and 'XII' can be seen as intensely self-conscious lyrics, in that both poems highlight poetic construction, skills of interpretation, and the extent of Bradley and Cooper's textual revisionism.
[87] Charles Segal, 'Philomela's Web and the Pleasures of the Text,' p.277.

although Ovid is not making a joke out of rape. For him it is no contradiction to present rape simultaneously as both an outrage committed upon a woman and as a grotesque caricature of masculinity.'[88] Representing the uncontrollable and irresistible force of wind and storm, Boreas symbolises the extremes of male sexual potency and sexual aggression. So how do Bradley and Cooper deal with this blustering god?

Humorous in their own way, Bradley and Cooper transform Ovid's Boreas from a rampaging rapist to a stiff breeze, exposing the god's hyper-masculine bluster for what it is. Far from threatening, Boreas is re-conceived as a purifying force: 'Sweep distress and care away!/ Let thy winds, wide-wandering, bleak,/ Dry the tears of Sappho's cheek!' Demonstrating the authority of the female poet, power is transferred from the male rapist to authoritative female figures. The once 'fierce' Thracian god is seen to have been tempered by Orithyia's love, so that he is now 'gentle grown.' Sappho, identifying with Orithyia, declares that, if the god does as she commands, she will venerate him and, 'thy mighty godhead own.' Persuasion may be one of Sappho's most highly prized skills, but it should be remembered that she (like Bradley and Cooper) only has the authority and ability to contain masculine force within the limits of lyric.

The themes of pursuit and metamorphosis are again highlighted in poem 'LXI,' which features another rape by another insatiable god.[89] Apollo's rape of Dryope does not appear in any of the original Sapphic fragments, but it does appear in Book IX of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[90] With extreme brevity, Ovid tells us that 'he who rules/ Delphi and Delos had assaulted' Dryope. On this occasion, Ovid provides no further details of the rape, preferring to tell us of the circumstances of Dryope's metamorphosis into a tree. Bradley and Cooper, on the other hand, devote a long lyric to this most disturbing of myths. Beginning, once again, in a pastoral setting, we know that the enchanting tone of poem 'LXI' will quickly change:

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[88] Curran, p.218.

[89] Another seemingly whimsical lyric, explicating Sappho's sense of unfulfilment and want, turns into something very different with the allusions to the Pleiades in poem 'XIX.' The Pleiades were virgin companions of Artemis, and, together with their mother Pleione, were pursued by the hunter Orion in Boeotia. For seven or even twelve years Orion is said to have pursued them with his unwelcome attentions, till Zeus in pity removed pursuer and pursued alike to heaven, there to shine as stars for ever and to continue the endless pursuit.

[90] Interestingly, Cooper reveals that Browning had shown a photograph of his son's statue of Dryope to the two poets. Cooper notes that lyric 'χέλνη' was written in response to the statue. See letter dated February 9th.1889, Add. Ms. 45851.

THERE is laughter soft and free
'Neath the pines of Thessaly,
Thrilling echoes, thrilling cries
Of pursuit, delight, surprise;
Dryope beneath the trees
With the Hamadryades
Plays upon the mountain-side:
Now they meet, and now they hide. (p.111)

The playful pursuit of Dryope by the nymphs is intended to contrast sharply with the more sinister sexual pursuit of maidens by male gods. That is not to say that the 'thrilling cries' of delight between the young women are non-sexual. Nymphs were, after all, known for their enjoyment of sex and sensuality. Curious as well as playful, Dryope can't wait to get her hands on the animal which suddenly appears before her:

On the hot and sandy ground,
Crumbling still as still they bound,
Crouches, basks a tortoise; all
But the mortal maiden fall
Back in trepidation; she
Takes the creature on her knee,
Strokes the ardent shell, and lays
Even her cheek against its blaze,

Till she calms her playmates' fear;
Suddenly beside her ear
Flashes forth a tongue; the beast
Changes, and with shape released
Grows into a serpent bright,
Covetous, subduing, tight
Round her body backward bent
In forlorn astonishment. (p.112)

A god without morality, the duplicitous Apollo has no qualms in deceiving the young maid to get what he wants. It is of course fitting that he metamorphoses into a phallic serpent, the coils of which quickly attain 'Full ascendancy—her breast/ By their passion is compressed/ Till her breath in terror fails.' The unrestrained passion of Apollo literally threatens to kill Dryope. Sex and death have never seemed quite so intimate:

And alone beneath the pine,

With the serpent's heavy twine
On her form, she almost dies:
But a magic from his eyes
Keeps her living, and entranced
At the wonder that has chanced,
And she feels a god within
Fiery looks that thrill and win. (p.112)

The animalistic imagery perfectly encapsulates the predatory aspect of the rapist and the dehumanization of the woman as a hunted animal. Almost totally subsumed by the physically dominant Apollo, Dryope is helpless and humiliated. Her sense of horror and physical distress is almost tangible. The absurdity of a woman being raped by a tortoise, which becomes a snake, does not neutralize the insinuation of female humiliation. Furthermore, Dryope is apparently won over by her rapist. Realising that her attacker is a god, and not just a mere mortal, Dryope is suddenly 'thrilled' at the fact of her rape. Disturbingly, Bradley and Cooper's poem suggests that women secretly entertain masochistic fantasies to be raped. The poem also implies that a woman will have sexual intercourse with almost anything, despite her protestations to the contrary.

Side-stepping the ethical implications of their poem, Bradley and Cooper suggest that the erotic context is all important:

'Tis Apollo in disguise
Holds possession of his prize.
Thus he binds in fetters dire
Those for whom he knows desire;
Mortal loves or poets—all
He must dominate, enthrall
By the rapture of his sway,
Which shall either bless or slay. (p.113)

Apollo himself cannot resist the raptures of Eros. Yet, his desire is combined with a need to dominate and captivate. As the god of poetry and music, Apollo's dark desires are seen to be inspirational. Indeed, Sappho suggests that the poet must be willing to be 'seduced' by poetry. Textual and sexual pleasures are indistinguishable, it seems.

The myths of Philomela, Boreas and Dryope appear to suggest that the demands of heterosexual passion are played out according to set a of pre-determined gender roles, where the male dominates and the female is subjugated. In other words, gender can be seen to engender sexual violence. But in Bradley and Cooper's vision, no-one's gender

identity is ever fully secure. As we have seen, Philomela and Procne take revenge against Tereus through equally brutal (masculine) means, the hyper-masculine Boreas is neutralized as a threat and Dryope survives her attack by Apollo to be transformed into a Dryad with the heightened awareness of a junior immortal. To underline their point, that gender identity can be as capricious as sexual desire, Bradley and Cooper invoke the mythical figure of Tiresias.

Not mentioned in any of the original Sapphic fragments, Tiresias can be seen as yet another textual ploy employed by Bradley and Cooper. Prins points out that, 'Tiresias embodies the contradictions of a poem written by two women (Bradley and Cooper), writing as a man (Michael Field) writing as a woman (Sappho) who writes about a man (Tiresias) who was once a woman.'[91] For White, 'Tiresias, a mystic, is mediated for Field through Sappho's writing, and functions as a model of ambiguous gender identity and the power of women.'[92] Prefixed by the cunning Greek epigraph, 'I know but by experience,' poem 'LII' can certainly be read as a poem about the bi-sexual poetic consciousness of 'Michael Field,' and a comment on the gendering of lyric poetry. On another level, poem 'XII' has much to say about eros, in relation to gender and power.

Tiresias is, of course, one of the most famous of metamorphic characters from ancient myth, and a recurrent figure in nineteenth century poetry.[93] Ovid tells his story in Book III of the *Metamorphoses*. In Ovid's version of the myth, Tiresias is employed by Juno and Jove to satisfy their disagreement over which sex gains more pleasure from love. Tiresias is engaged on the basis that he has spent seven years as a woman; the result of having struck two snakes copulating. A not so wise Tiresias finds in favour of Jove's 'joke,' that it is women who gain more pleasure from love. According to Ovid, Juno takes 'umbrage beyond all reason, out of all/ Proportion, and condemned her judge to live/ In the black night of blindness ever more.' To relieve Juno's penalty, Jove gives Tiresias the gift of prophecy.

Bradley and Cooper provide a fairly faithful rendition of Ovid's myth, but also choose to include details of Tiresias' 'quickening change':

> When womanhood was round him thrown:
> He trembled at the quickening change,

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[91] Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, p.92.
[92] White, 'The Tiresian Poet: Michael Field,' p. 149.
[93] One immediately thinks of Tennyson's 'Tiresias' produced only four years earlier in 1885.

He trembled at his vision's range,
His finer sense for bliss and dole,
His receptivity of soul;
But when love came, and, loving back,
He learnt the pleasure men must lack,
It seemed that he had broken free
Almost from his mortality.

(p.89-90)

According to Chris White, 'at the moment of transition from female to male, Tiresias has a masculine consciousness and a feminine memory, and is an emotional hermaphrodite.' Further, 'Tiresias is a representation of the absence of any clear split between male and female in Michael Field's utopian vision.'[94] Tiresias' change is actually framed somewhat differently.

Tiresias' transformation is not an example of wish-fulfillment. Rather, Tiresias is punished for his dismissive and cruel actions toward the copulating snakes. In denying eros, and female sexual agency, Tiresias angers the *Erinyes*, the avenging female Furies. He is consequently transformed into a woman in order to learn the 'unfamiliar, sovereign guise/ Of passion he had dared despise.' The lesson that Tiresias is supposed to learn is that women's experience of eros is altogether different from that of men. In other words, *sexual difference* is the source of Tiresias' metamorphosis, and not a utopian urge toward gender equality.

Much of Bradley and Cooper's poem is focused, not on Tiresias but on the (gender-bending) queen of the gods, Hera. Hera is of course, the long-suffering wife of that most famous rapist and philanderer, Zeus. Her perspective on love and passion is informed by her own painful experiences as a betrayed wife. So, when Tiresias finds in Zeus' favour, a deeply suspicious Hera questions Tiresias' ability to empathise with women:

Tiresias, ere the goddess smite,
Look on me with unblinded sight,
That I may learn if thou hast part
In womanhood's secluded heart:
Medea's penetrative charm
Own'st thou to succour and disarm,
Hast thou her passion inly great
Heroes to mould and subjugate? (p.91)

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[94] White, 'The Tiresian Poet,' p.155.

The allusion to Medea is yet another reference to the *Metamorphoses*. Hera is clever to refer to another ill-used and abused wife, as a means to bolster her argument against Tiresias' judgement. As Hera knows, Medea does not gain pleasure and enjoyment from her relationship with Jason. Rather, Medea's masochistic act of infanticide, her crime of passion against Jason, lives on in infamy. Unless Tiresias can understand Medea's frustrations and explain her motivations, he cannot know 'womanhood's secluded heart.'

Hera also cites the tale of Daphne as a means of illustrating Tiresias' lack of understanding and experience:

> Can'st thou divine how sweet to bring
> Apollo to thy blossoming
> As Daphne; or, as just a child
> Gathering a bunch of tulips wild,
> To feel the flowery hill-side rent
> Convulsive for thy ravishment?
>
> (p.91)

Hera's point, that Tiresias is blind to women's suffering as a consequence of unrestrained male sexual passion and aggression, is powerfully illustrated by the example of Daphne. Daphne's terrible degradation at the hands of Apollo is one of the first myths of the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid tells us that, stung by the arrow of a spiteful Cupid, Apollo becomes besotted by Daphne. Daphne, on the other hand, is struck by an arrow tipped with lead, which hardens her heart against men and marriage. The circumstances set, the chase begins. At first, the arrogant Apollo attempts to seduce Daphne with his silky rhetoric, but Daphne flees. 'So ran the god and girl, he sped by hope/ And she by fear. But he, borne on the wings/ Of love, ran faster, gave no respite.' In terror Daphne appeals to her father, the river god Peneus, to 'change me and destroy/ My baleful beauty that has pleased too well.' At the will of another male, Daphne metamorphoses into a laurel tree, which Apollo proceeds to ravish. To complete his assault, Apollo declares the laurel tree to be 'his' tree for evermore. Suddenly, Sappho's 'dark-leaved laurels,' which she wears as an acknowledgement of her poetic pre-eminence, take on a very different significance.

Daphne's one and only experience of *eros* is that she is hunted, physically transformed and raped, because she is beautiful. Is that the kind of pleasure you were

referring to, Hera asks of Tiresias? Perhaps you had the experience of being raped, as a young defenceless maiden by an aggressive and sadistic male god? Before Tiresias can answer, Hera interjects: 'Thou need'st not to unlock thine eyes,/ Thy slow, ironic smile replies.' Tiresias, of course, could not wait to transform himself back into a man: 'crushing at a stroke the male,/ Had'st virtue from thy doom to break,/ And lost virility to re-take—' Despite his years as a woman, Tiresias' consciousness was never really bi-sexual. He never really understood that unrestrained masculine sexual energy can have tragic consequences for women. Having been made aware of his lack of experience and understanding, Tiresias may want to rethink his judgement.

Hera's sarcasm may be seen to act as an antidote to all of the metamorphosed females who were prevented from articulating their rage and anger. Indeed, Hera ends up teaching Tiresias a lesson or two in poem 'LII.' There is nothing softly romantic or rose-tinted about Hera's view of marriage and male sexuality. Indeed, her perspective is valuable precisely because it is the view of a neglected and disrespected wife and mother. However, despite Bradley and Cooper's overt revisionism, Richlin points out that, 'the cross-sex fantasy model offers no exit from gender hierarchy. The female is still the site of violence, no matter what the location of the subject. Even if the magician and the lady change places, *he* is still taking *her* place.'[95] Consequently, even if Bradley and Cooper re-write Ovid's myths in order to expose the hierarchy of gender, one must be alive to the fact that, whatever their intentions, Bradley and Cooper effectively re-inscribe the notion of male dominance and female suffering.

As Richlin points out, Ovid's 'beloved' metaphor, '*militant omnis amans*,' ('every lover is a soldier') suggests that Ovid saw masculine violence as an integral part of love. Women's fear of rape in the *Metamorphoses* may consequently be considered as part of Ovid's (somewhat cynical) seductive textual strategy. As Richlin notes, 'if the *Metamorphoses* lays bare a cruel cosmos, it does so voluptuously,' so that the 'pleasure of the style and the pleasure in the content are congruent.'[96] The detailed descriptions of rapes and acts of violence in the *Metamorphoses* therefore present a number of ideological issues for women writers who choose to appropriate Ovid's work. In regurgitating Ovidian episodes of rape, albeit from a female perspective, Bradley and

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[95] Richlin, 'Reading Ovid's Rapes,' p.178.
[96] Richlin, 'Reading Ovid's Rapes,' p.176.

Cooper threaten to objectify their female subjects, reinforce women's powerlessness and legitimise rape as an attractive textual strategy. I suggest that Bradley and Cooper manage to avoid such charges, as their concern is not with re-presenting the details of physical violence for merely titillating literary purposes. On the contrary, the Ovidian narratives of *Long Ago* can be seen to emphasize the link between gender, power and sexual violence.

There is no doubt that in the poems alluding to Philomela, Dryope, Boreas and Daphne, hyper-masculinity is associated with rape. Yet, with one exception, the women in these myths are violated by male gods, not men. As immortals, the Greek gods have no knowledge and no fear of death or suffering. They take what they want, when they want it—no questions, no consequences. The gods do not endure their desires. Neither do they feel the life affirming impulse of passion. Consequently, the gods cannot know the sensations and significance of Eros. Women (or female deities like Demeter) on the other hand, understand suffering to a peculiarly intense degree.

Mortals, Bradley and Cooper suggest, do not enjoy the same autonomy as the gods. For instance, Tereus and Jason, Greek 'heroes' who act like gods, are violently punished for their disrespect of women. Similarly, Tiresias is punished for arrogantly assuming that he understands the passions of women. In contrast, Sappho's great triumph is that she uses the power of 'Dark Eros' for her art, without ever fully succumbing to the physically violent aspects of passion. The maidens of Michael Field's Lesbos might be as erotically charged as the males, but they never resort to violence against others in order to satisfy their lust. Rape is re-presented as an issue of power relations in *Long Ago* and not as an inevitable product of libidinal energy. Bradley and Cooper can, therefore, be seen to challenge Ovid's (authoritative) approach to passion and to de-mystify Eros, from a woman's perspective.

Leighton suggests that 'Michael Field rescues Sappho from her cliff-edge of despair and, with her, the female imagination itself from all its chronically miserable effusions of the heart.'[97] Despite the 'laughingly sexual and rebellious tone' of much of *Long Ago*, Bradley and Cooper conclude the volume with the poem, 'O FREE me, for I take the leap.' Michael Field's lyric is Sappho's last heart rending appeal to the gods to free her from the pain of love and loss:

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[97] Angela Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, p.211.

Ah, lord of speech, well dost thou know
The incommunicable woe
Finds not in lyric cry release,
Finds but in Hades' bosom peace;
And therefore on thy temple-ground
Thou pointest lovers to the mound
Set high above the billows' sound. (p.128)

No longer able to channel her erotic energies into lyric song, Sappho finally succumbs to the darkness. Sappho has no intention of carrying her knowledge, of the pain of love, into the next life. She longs for an end to the constancy of her soul. Instead, she desires to be 'a dumb sea-bird with breast love-free,/ And feel the waves fall over me.'[98]

Sappho's tragic knowledge of eros, as recorded in her fragmented lyrics, will live on. But she will suffer its torments no longer. As O'Gorman points out, 'aspiring to rebirth in a new form (and intriguingly a dumb one), Sappho…unobtrusively tropes the truth she cannot yet know: that a condition of her survival among men after her plunge into unfathomed seas is a radical metamorphosis.'[99] Recalling Philomela's transformation, Sappho knows that her act of self-immolation will not end her song. Rather, her final dramatic act will allow her to take her place amongst the Muses.

Indeed, Sappho does not stay dead. Joan De Jean suggests that throughout the nineteenth century Sappho is repeatedly 'redeemed' by writers, translators and editors, as part of a movement toward her Christianization:

> Her recovery is often viewed as her salvation, if not from sin, at least from accusations of sinfulness. Writers like Baudelaire, who do not portray Sappho's chastity, at least have recourse to religious terminology to characterize her as a virgin of perversity, as though sexuality could not be expressed outside the dominant moral vocabulary of the day.[100]

By framing their exploration of desire in entirely pagan terms, Bradley and Cooper manage to evade and challenge the dominant moral vocabulary of the day. Indeed, by presenting a spectrum of erotic desire, Bradley and Cooper attempt to generate a more sophisticated approach to sexuality and passion, outside of a dichotomized Christian

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[98] It is interesting to read this poem alongside Swinburne's 'On the Cliffs.'
[99] O'Gorman, 'Michael Field and Sapphic Fame,' p.656.
[100] Joan De Jean, *Fictions of Sappho*, p.201.

moral framework. As such, there is no sin in Michael Field's Lesbos and Bradley and Cooper's Sappho is neither a virgin nor a whore.[101] Despite the fact that Bradley and Cooper's Sappho must suffer her desires, she is not punished for having or fulfilling her physical passions.

Anthony H. Harrison points out that 'the dominant subject of Swinburne's poetry is human passion, whether his focus be upon his characters' explicitly erotic and often perverse impulses or upon their corollary spiritual desires, which are often represented by means of sexual metaphors.'[102] In other words, passion in Swinburne's erotic poetry is represented as a sophisticated combination of corporeal pleasure and spirituality. Furthermore, at the core of Swinburne's erotic poetry, as Harrison notes, is the philosophical concept of 'moral passion'; 'of enrichment and redemption through desire and through suffering.'[103] I suggest that Michael Field shares a similar interest in representing the spiritual and physical origins of human passion, which exists outside the mind-body dualism of conventional Christian morality. Furthermore, Bradley and Cooper's female-centered Sappho is, like Swinburne's, a challenge to many late-Victorian conceptions of homoerotic desire as a predominantly male experience. *Long Ago* is, therefore, undoubtedly a foray into Victorian sexual politics, in so far as Bradley and Cooper confront and explore dominant cultural ideas about the nature of desire and sexuality.

It should be noted that all three female protagonists from the Hellenic dramas of Michael Field commit suicide, overtaken by the irresistible demands of libidinal energies. If we recall, the unfulfilled Anteia poisons herself via a suitably phallic girdle; the virginal Callirhoë stabs herself with an appropriately phallic dagger, whilst the tragic figure of Sappho immerses herself in the (maternal, eternal feminine) waters of Lesbos. One might therefore consider that Michael Field's Hellenic poetics are more destructive for women than productive. Yet, throughout Michael Field's Hellenic dramas, female characters suffer only when they refuse to acknowledge their sexual desires, or if their desires remained unfulfilled. As Michael Field demonstrate in *Bellerophôn* and *Callirhoë*, the voluntary repression or sublimation of emotion and sexual desire can have little meaning for women whose bodies are socially regulated and controlled.

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[101] See De Jean's formulation of the nineteenth-century Sapphic tradition, p.203.
[102] Harrison, 'Swinburne's Losses,' p.690.
[103] Harrison, 'Swinburne's Losses,' p.690.

Cleverly surmounting the repressive legislation and social prohibitions of the day, Bradley and Cooper created communities of actively desiring and creative women. In both *Callirhoë* and *Long Ago*, desire is, for the most part, experienced and enjoyed by female characters. Yet, the Ovidian narratives of *Long Ago* remind us, that the fulfillment of sexual desire is always subject to gendered power relations. Espousing a kind of late-Victorian eco-feminism, Michael Field repopulates the lands of Hellas with maenads and Lesbians maidens.

As I've suggested throughout this chapter, Swinburne, described by Ezra Pound as 'master of initiating/ Maenads,' is a major influence in the work of Michael Field.[104] But he is no controlling Coresus. Bradley and Cooper's peculiar brand of Dionysiac Hellenism is most certainly their own. On an artistic level, Bradley and Cooper appear to suggest that true artistic vision, in communion with the divine, can only be achieved through what might be called an 'ecstatic aesthetic.'[105] In all three Greek volumes, the ecstatic moment is seemingly achieved at the point of death, at the climax of tragedy. What this suggests is that Bradley and Cooper were interested in the philosophical and spiritual implications of physical rapture, as well as the creative possibilities of sexual pleasure. Indeed, in conversation with Oscar Wilde, Bradley and Cooper agreed that the 'whole problem of life turns on pleasure.'[106] For Wilde, in particular, the statement could not have been more pertinent. In April 1896, following the Wilde trials, Katharine and Edith returned to the subject of Dionysus as they considered a full rewrite of *Io Bacchae!:* 'the great poem on the Life of Dionysus that we burst to work at.'[107] Despite the initial enthusiasm, sadly, Dionysus did not burst forth again.

The Dying Notes of Victorian Hellenism

The critical applause that greeted the publication of *Callirhoë* and *Long Ago* did not last. Katharine, feeling undermined by the lack of public attention and critical praise, wrote to Havelock Ellis: 'Want of due recognition is beginning its embittering, disintegrating

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[104] See Pound's poem 'Salve O Pontifex' from *A Lume Spento* (Venice: A. Antonini, 1908).
[105] Jill Marsden provides an interesting reading of Nietzsche's 'ecstatic philosophy.' See Marsden, *After Nietzsche: Notes Toward a Philosophy of Ecstasy* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002). Whilst I'm not suggesting that Michael Field wholeheartedly adopted Nietzsche's philosophical outlook, aspects of his work can prove useful to an analysis of Michael Field's poetry.
[106] Field, *Works and Days*, p.136.

work, and we will have in the end a cynic such as only a disillusioned Bacchante can become.'[108] In 1907 Edith, followed by Katharine, converted to Catholicism. Edith described their conversion, from Dionysian desire to the passion of Christ, as the twilight of the pagan gods: 'Demeter and Dionysus (our lord Bacchus) yield themselves up as victims to the great Host.'[109] Michael Field never really lost their taste for Bacchic wine, despite the allure of communion and the theatrical rites of the Roman church. Indeed, it was to the Greek gods that Katharine returned, as Edith lay dying from cancer. On the last day of 1913, Katharine wrote the following passage to Edith:

> I have been praying [...] that I may sing glorious Sunset Songs, with her, for her, & to her. My great hope in God shall be that I may do this. Henry, My Beloved, I am with thee again, & beside thee in our work. I cannot pray for thee, as that were a distant thing. Thou dost not remain half the time with me in Paragon, as Proserpina in hell, but half thy self is restored to me and in secret Henry and Michael are one. Sing with me, through me, O my Beloved.[110]

'Poets and lovers evermore,' Katharine, at least, remained true to the old faith. If, as the poem 'Prologue' tells us, the two women began their career, 'laughing and dreaming on Lethe's shore' they concluded their life-long adventure on the beaches of a far-flung island with the Argonauts.[111]

Aptly, Mary Sturgeon concludes her biography of Michael Field, as I will conclude, with the following words:

> The Dionysian wine of those early days was poured at last to the Man of Sorrows; the Bacchic revel was turned to tragedy. But it was the same wine; the same energy of enthusiasm; and the latest-written lyrics, devotional pieces composed in suffering and very near to death, have often the audacity and abandon of the worshipper of the vine-god. The poet is Mænad still.[112]

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[107] See reference in Treby, *The Michael Field Catalogue*, p.34.
[108] Sturgeon, p.30.
[109] Field, *Works and Days*, p.273.
[110] Add. Ms 46803, labelled as p.100.
[111] See the poem 'Fellowship,' re-printed in *Works and Days*, p.331.
[112] Sturgeon, p.64.

Chapter Three

Worlds without Women: Emily Pfeiffer's Political Hellenism

Almost ten years ago Kathleen Hickok asked why Emily Pfeiffer 'was still missing?'[1] What Hickok meant was that Emily Pfeiffer had been overlooked in the feminist drive to reclaim 'lost' women writers from the dark recesses of literary history. Whereas Amy Levy and Michael Field have received much critical attention in recent years, Pfeiffer remains critically neglected.[2] The critical silence is hard to fathom, not least because Pfeiffer is a writer of great range and quality, who received good reviews during her lifetime. Included in her long list of publications are volumes of poetry, a fascinating travelogue, a drama and political essays. Pfeiffer should also be seen as a significant nineteenth-century figure in terms of the campaigns for equal employment rights and female suffrage. Throughout the 1880s, she wrote a number of articles for the *Contemporary Review* and *Cornhill Magazine* on the status of women in Britain with regard to work, education, legal rights and suffrage. Collected under the title of *Women and Work*, Pfeiffer's essays are an impassioned argument in favour of women's collective entry into higher education and work.[3]

Largely self-educated, Pfeiffer was all too aware of the difficulties faced by ambitious young women. Her amateur education did not, however, dissuade Pfeiffer from pursuing her interest in classical literature and mythology. With the emotional and financial support of her husband, and the intellectual encouragement of Professor John Stuart Blackie (1809-1895) and Rector Mark Pattison, Pfeiffer immersed herself in

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[1] Kathleen Hickok, 'Why is this Woman Still Missing? Emily, Pfeiffer, Victorian Poet' in Armstrong and Blain eds., *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian: Gender and Genre, 1830-1900* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), pp.373-389.

[2] In recent anthologies on Victorian women's poetry, such as those by Armstrong & Blain (1999), and Leighton & Reynolds (1995), Pfeiffer briefly appears. However, detailed critical analysis of Pfeiffer's work remains in short supply.

[3] It seems that Pfeiffer was inspired by the example of the early 'feminist' campaigner Barbara Leigh Bodichon, who published her thoughts on *Women and Work* in 1858.

classical literature.[4] Appropriately enough, for such a politically engaged writer, Pfeiffer found Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Sophocles' *Antigone* particularly appealing. Indeed, Emily Pfeiffer was particularly fond of women who could articulate their struggles in the face of patriarchal oppression. In *Flying Leaves*, for instance, Pfeiffer declares that Antigone, 'who is so real to us who behold her over a chasm of two thousand years—so individual, bearing as she does all through her nobleness the marks of the accidents of her doomed life—is nevertheless a type of essential womanhood.'[5] In admiration of Sophocles' creation ('in an age when the virtues proper to women were mostly the invention of men!'), Pfeiffer describes the dialogue between Antigone and Creon as 'stroke on stroke, like the clash of swords at fence.' Pfeiffer conceives Antigone's power of speech to be utterly petrifying to Creon:

> The woman seems to rise to more than mortal height in the unequal contest: she is sublime, almost terrible, in her fearlessness; we are awed, we shrink before her in unconquerable pride of duty; and then we seem to see the statue quiver…A word has done it, revealing the source of her strength…Not Dante, not Shakespeare's self, has ever given us a more affecting picture, or revealed so overpowering a flash the living fountain of woman's strength.[6]

In the figures of Cassandra, Clytemnestra, and Antigone, Pfeiffer found the literary counterparts to her own frustrated desires for social and political equality. Truly daughters of Dionysus, these tragic heroines have come to be associated with irrationality, violence and political injustice. For Pfeiffer, however, the stories of Kassandra, Klytemnestra and Antigone represented women's ability to protest and fight against male oppression and exploitation.

Following her early enthusiasm, Pfeiffer became increasingly cautious about the widespread influence of ancient Greek culture on Victorian Britain. The social and

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[4] Pfeiffer enjoyed a close friendship with John Blackie and his wife as well as a lively correspondence, as revealed from letters from the 'Blackie Collection' held by National Library of Scotland. It is said that Mark Pattison was the model for George Eliot's Mr. Causabon. Yet the brief glimpses we have of Pattison's correspondence with Pfeiffer would seem to suggest that the suggestion is unfair, if not misleading. For more on the interesting and lively debate about Eliot and Pattison, see A.D. Nuttal's *Dead from the Waist Down: Scholars and Scholarship in Literature and the Popular Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

[5] Extract from Pfeiffer's *Flying Leaves from East and West* (London: Field & Tuer, 1885), p.64.

[6] Pfeiffer, *Flying Leaves*, p.64.

political values of the androcentric ancient Greeks were not, Pfeiffer argued, appropriate models for the modern British Empire:

> The Attic love of beauty and sympathy with all that is gracious in life stirs me in every fibre of souls and sense, and yet leaves me plenty of scorn for the shallow, dilettante Hellenism which would set up again the fossil remains, the mere empty shells, of ideas which, so far as they were vital, have all 'suffered a sea-change,' and passed into the things 'new and strange' of our many-sided modern existence.[7]

Apparently in response to the popular resurgence in classical philosophy, Pfeiffer singled out Plato's *Republic* for particular criticism: 'it is the masculine spirit working alone that we trace in this portion [Book V] of the wonderful Utopia—the Babel tower whose malarious ruins are still to be found in Constantinople and elsewhere under the rule of the Turk.'[8] In contrast, Pfeiffer lauded the poetry of the ancient dramatists, on the basis that the poets had an instinctive sympathy with the social and political condition of women: 'in the great trinity of dramatists, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, poetry and womanhood, love and truth, were justified as against philosophy.'[9] As far as Pfeiffer was concerned, the literature of Ancient Greece was a rich resource for the imagination; loaded with symbolism and associations. What it was not, was a template for contemporary politics.

The eldest daughter of Thomas Richard Davis and his wife Emily Tilsley, Emily Jane Davis was born in 1827, in Montgomeryshire, Wales. It seems that Thomas and Emily Davis struggled to provide little more than the bare necessities for their children, due to financial hardship brought about by the collapse of the family bank. Under such circumstances, it is hardly surprising that Emily and her sisters did not receive a formal education. As we know, most girls and women in nineteenth-century Britain did not enjoy the same educational opportunities as their male peers, even if money was not a consideration. However, Emily's father, who himself delighted in drawing and painting, encouraged the study and practice of painting and reading at home. Whilst Pfeiffer's early education was sparse and amateurish, it was representative of many literary women's educations in the nineteenth century. Moreover, this early tutoring bore much

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[7] Pfeiffer, *Flying Leaves*, p.69.
[8] Pfeiffer, *Flying Leaves*, p.65.
[9] Pfeiffer, *Flying Leaves*, p.63.

fruit, as Emily not only went on to become a published author, she also exhibited paintings at the Royal Academy.[10]

Basil Herbertson suggests that a turning point occurred in Emily's life when, as a young woman, she was taken on a trip to Europe by a friend.[11] The trip up the Rhine valley greatly expanded Emily's experience of the world and soon afterwards she spent a season in London where she met her husband and travel companion-to-be, Jürgen Edward Pfeiffer. In Edward Pfeiffer, Emily seems to have chosen a partner who shared both her interests and beliefs.[12] A prosperous merchant, Pfeiffer not only encouraged his wife's literary and political activities, he was also a passionate supporter and sponsor of the higher education of women. Indeed, following the deaths of the couple large sums of the Pfeiffers' estate were bequeathed towards projects supporting opportunities for women in work and education. To this day, one may still find the Pfeiffer gates guarding the entrance to the grounds of Newnham College, and the Pfeiffer Wing at Hughes Hall, Cambridge.[13]

Unfortunately, Pfeiffer's literary legacy does not match her philanthropic achievements. With the twin misfortunes of having no children to whom to bestow her literary estate, and having a large portion of her work destroyed in a fire, Pfeiffer's reputation has unduly suffered. The 1880s were her most productive years, in which she produced four volumes of verse, including *Sonnets and Songs* (1880), *Under the Aspens: Lyrical and Dramatic* (1882), *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock and How it Grew* (1884), *Sonnets, Revised and Enlarged* (1886) and *Flowers of the Night* (1889). Skilled in terms of metrical and formal arrangements, Pfeiffer became something of a renowned sonneteer. For example, *The Academy* observed that in terms of the sonnet, Pfeiffer 'possessed the qualifications of a refined imagination and considerable metrical faculty. Her sensitive and cultured mind was also open to receive the impulses of thought and feeling which are most characteristic of our self-conscious age.' 'Suffice it to say,' the reviewer continues, 'that Mrs. Pfeiffer's poetry, whether we consider its quantity or its

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[10] See Basil Herbertson's unpublished article, 'The Pfeiffer Bequest and the Education of Women: A Centenary Review' (Hughes Hall; Cambridge, 1998), p.5.
[11] Herbertson, p.3.
[12] Pfeiffer typically signed his name J. Edward Pfeiffer, perhaps indicating his preference for the more Anglicized version of his name.
[13] Funds were also provided to endow a school of dramatic art for women and to establish an orphanage. The remainder was left to trustees to further women's higher education: £2000 of this was used to build

quality, will contrast favorably with the poetry of any living men, except the first half-dozen.'[14]

Unapologetically female-orientated, Pfeiffer's poetry includes a number of sympathetic portrayals of downtrodden women. In poems such as 'From Out of the Night,' 'A Protest' and 'Outlawed,' Pfeiffer boldly deals with the subjects of female sexuality, betrayal, the rights of mothers in relation to their children, prostitution and suicide. Playful as well as purposeful, Pfeiffer also wrote poems on other transgressive female figures, such as 'The Witch's Last Ride.' As Hickok observes, 'in general, Pfeiffer wrote about the pressures on women, their victimization, and the strategies they employed for escaping.'[15]

Pfeiffer's 'Studies from the Antique' and her travelogue *Flying Leaves* continue the themes of oppression and liberation. In the twin-sonnets, 'Kassandra' and 'Klytemnestra,' Pfeiffer explores the themes of victimization and emancipation of women from two very different, but complimentary angles. In the poem 'Hellas,' Pfeiffer not only deals with the struggles of modern Greeks for independence, but also the liberatory potential of Hellenism. In her travelogue *Flying Leaves*, on the other hand, Pfeiffer adroitly compares the oppression of women in the ancient Greek world (and the contemporary Turkish harems), with the struggles of modern British women for social and political emancipation. If the ancient Greek world was a 'world without woman,' Pfeiffer did not want the modern British state to mirror history. In looking back, Pfeiffer only ever intended to imagine a brighter future for women.

Emily Pfeiffer's 'Studies from the Antique'

If, as Bernard Knox suggests, Western European history began with a war, then it also began with a battle between the sexes. Homer tells us in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* that King Agamemnon triumphs in his ten year war against the Trojans, only to be slain by his wife on his return to his kingdom. As Robert Fagles succinctly suggests, 'the Fury of the Father collides in Argos with the Fury of the Mother, and the Mother wins a battle to the

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Aberdare Hall, the first dormitory for women at the University College of South Wales, Cardiff, which was opened in 1895.

[14] Extract taken from an obituary for Pfeiffer in *The Academy* (April 19, 1890).

[15] Hickok, 'Why is this Woman Still Missing?' p.373.

death.'[16] Of course, the battle between the sexes does not end with the murder of the king, and the male patriarch is not the only victim of Clytemnestra's rage. In Aeschylus's *Agamemnon,* after murdering the king, the queen also kills the Trojan captive, Cassandra. Cassandra is not only the victim of the murderous Clytemnestra, however, but also of the god Apollo, who endows Cassandra with the gift of prophecy only to make her speech unintelligible. Aeschylus' Cassandra can be seen as the polar opposite of Clytemnestra; an incomprehensible captive who falls victim to a (rhetorically) powerful and vengeful queen.

In 'Studies from the Antique,' Emily Pfeiffer can be seen to take a completely different approach to two of the most compelling and suggestive female figures in ancient Greek tragedy. Pfeiffer elects to pair her poems on Kassandra and Klytemnestra [sic], in order to highlight the commonalities as well as the differences between the Trojan maiden and the Greek queen. Kassandra and Klytemnestra both suffer violence and both violently protest against their subjugation. Furthermore, neither woman is to be trusted by men; Klytemnestra because of her duplicity and infidelity and Kassandra because of her duplicity against Apollo and her prophetic powers. The stories of Clytemnestra and Cassandra come together at a pivotal moment in the creation of European legal, social and political culture. In many ways, therefore, we may see these female figures play out roles which become templates or archetypes in the European imagination. Pfeiffer revises the relationship between Klytemnestra and Kassandra in order to question the integrity of those archetypes.

Pfeiffer's 'Studies from the Antique' is comprised of four sonnets, two for each character. The first edition of the twin-poems, published as part of *Quarterman's Grace & Other Poems* in 1879, included only a single sonnet on Klytemnestra. The second sonnet was added to the subsequent editions of 'Studies of the Antique,' which appeared as part of *Sonnets and Songs* in 1880. The four sonnets not only provide balance to the two portrayals, but also allow Klytemnestra and Kassandra to be seen as relative equals; the Greek queen brought to her ruin by the king that murdered her child, and the captive barbarian seer, ruined by the god who stole her virginity and reputation. The collective

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[16] All subsequent quotations from Aeschylus' trilogy will be taken from Robert Fagles's highly acclaimed translation, *Aeschylus, The Oresteia* (London: Penguin, 1966, 1979), p.22.

Plate VI, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Cassandra* (1870)

title is also highly suggestive insofar as 'study' not only reflects Pfeiffer's technique of literary portraiture, but also her developing erudition.

Another technique that Pfeiffer repeatedly employed was that of responding in verse to visual images. For instance, included in the volume *Sonnets and Songs* (1880), were the poems, 'To E. Burne Jones, on His Picture of the Annunciation,' 'Suggested by the Picture of the Annunciation of E. Burne Jones' and 'King Copehetua and the Beggar Maid, Suggested by the Picture of E. Burne Jones.' Interestingly, Dante Gabriel Rossetti produced two sonnets on the story of Cassandra in the 1870 edition of *Poems*. Entitled 'Cassandra (For a Drawing),' Rossetti intended his sonnets to be read in conjunction with a large-scale painting of Cassandra. Unfortunately, this ekphrastic experiment never fully materialized, as Rossetti failed to begin the painting. However, Rossetti did produce a sketch for 'Cassandra,' which he described in a footnote to the sonnets: 'The subject shows Cassandra prophesying among her kindred, as Hector leaves them for his last battle. They are on the platform of a fortress, from which the Trojan troops are marching out. Helen is arming Paris; Priam soothes Hecuba; and Andromache holds the child to her bosom' (Plate VI).[17] As we will see, Rossetti's crowded vision of the fall of Troy has little in common in terms of content with Pfeiffer's interpretation of Cassandra's story. Nevertheless, Rossetti's two sonnets on Cassandra may be seen to have inspired Pfeiffer's own re-presentation of Cassandra.

Pfeiffer may also be indebted to the Scottish writer Charles Mackay. In 1864, Mackay wrote a volume entitled *Studies from the Antique* in which he included a poem on Cassandra. Mackay's short sonnet sequence does not refer to the Trojan War or Cassandra's historical reputation. Rather, Mackay appropriates the figure of the female sage as a means of highlighting his vociferous opinions on the state of British society. Whilst Pfeiffer can also be seen to use the female sage as a means of contemporary observation and protest, she, perhaps paradoxically, also emphasizes the enforced silence of intellectual women. Consequently, whilst Mackay's 'Studies' may have stimulated Pfeiffer's interest in the subject of Cassandra, there seems to be no further correlation between the two poems.

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[17] Footnote to Rossetti's 'Cassandra,' included in both *Poems* (London: F.S. Ellis, 1870), p.252 and *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Ellis, 1911), p.213.

Like Rossetti, Pfeiffer was a highly accomplished exponent of the sonnet form. In the nineteenth century, some of the greatest proponents of the sonnet were in fact women writers, such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti and Michael Field. Traditionally, however, the Petrarchan sonnet has been seen as a male-dominated form in that the medium frequently features a male speaker who addresses an idealized, though absent or unobtainable, female beloved. Indeed, the sonnet form may pose problems particular to the woman writer, as Alison Chapman explains: 'when women poets write from within the convention, they are faced with its inexorable code that counsels them to silence.' Yet, the form can also be highly effective for the female poet, as Chapman suggests, 'many of Christina Rossetti's sonnets ironically speak from the position of the dispossessed, marginalized, silenced and excluded.'[18] One immediately thinks of Christina Rossetti's 'After Death,' or the tantalizing 'In an Artist's Studio.' Similarly, Emily Pfeiffer can be seen to amend the sonnet form for her feminist-orientated poetics. Her subjects are not the unattainable female beloved, but the castigated and denigrated female figures from antiquity.

Pfeiffer's pairing of 'Kassandra' and 'Klytemnestra' not only indicates her intention to disrupt conventional wisdom, (Clytemnestra is not a natural bed-fellow of Cassandra), but also her desire to unite the two women under a single banner, 'Studies from the Antique.' Crucially for Pfeiffer, the stories of both women concern injustice and the violation of laws that are meant to keep women safe from harm. Furthermore, both of these female figures are powerful and threatening as they exhibit powers beyond male mastery and both women threaten the structure of the patriarchal family and the Greek system of kinship. Yet, despite the formal arrangement of the sonnets, Pfeiffer refuses to connect the women. Neither poem contains a reference to the other woman. This deliberate division/juxtaposition of the female characters not only illustrates the difficulties women have in uniting against their shared oppression, but also represents the mirror-like relationship between the women.

We may consider Kassandra to be the more conventionally docile, 'feminine' figure, as opposed to her more deviant, 'masculine' counterpart, Klytemnestra. However, the two female figures are not intended to be viewed in isolation, nor as binary opposites.

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[18] Alison Chapman, 'Sonnet and Sonnet Sequence' in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, eds. Cronin, Chapman & Harrison (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp.99-114 (p.102).

Both female figures can be seen to blur gender categories, albeit in different ways. For instance, Kassandra speaks like a man, but succumbs to Apollo like a woman. Klytemnestra is a mother and a wife, but she wreaks revenge like a hero and she governs like a king. Taken together, we can appreciate the different talents of each woman. Furthermore, we are also invited to see that if such powerful women chose to become allies, they would be a formidable force indeed.

The violence which traditionally binds these two female figures takes place within the house, not on the battlefield. Often in the plays of Aeschylus and Euripides the house *is* the battlefield, but in the case of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* the metaphor can be extended. As Fagles and Stanford suggest, 'the house of Atreus is the embodiment of savagery. No other Greek family can rival it for accumulated atrocities.'[19] And yet, Fagles interprets Aeschylus' tragic trilogy as a tale of 'light after darkness,' a 'rite of passage from savagery to civilization.'[20] Indeed, as Goldhill points out, traditional readings of the *Oresteia* suggest that there is a movement in Aeschylus's trilogy 'from tragic problems to a resolution in the harmony of an achieved social order, from violence to mediation, from the darkness and despair of the corrupt house to the shining glories of the city of Athens.'[21] But as Goldhill suggests, this reading of the trilogy has been opposed mainly by Marxist and feminist critics, 'who have seen the "justice" at the end of the work not as a triumph of reasoned civilization but as an evolution towards the apparatus of state authority on the one hand and, and towards the enforcement of patriarchal authority on the other.'[22] The legal order which comes into force at the end of the *Eumenides* is, in other words, a complex ideological construction rather than a simple evolutionary movement toward 'social order.'

Macintosh notes that, 'the nineteenth-century obsession with origins and the evolutionary process meant that both the idea of a transgenerational curse and the notion of political and social progress from a tribal to a civic system were of particular interest to Victorian audiences.'[23] The nineteenth-century interest in origins was also bolstered

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[19] Extract from the essay by Robert Fagles and W.B. Stanford entitled, 'The Serpent and the Eagle: A Reading of the *Oresteia*,' which forms the introduction to Fagles' translation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, p.14.
[20] Fagles, p.19.
[21] Simon Goldhill, *Aeschylus: The Oresteia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.33.
[22] Goldhill, *Aeschylus*, p.33.
[23] Macintosh, 'Viewing Agamemnon in Nineteenth-Century Britain' in *Agamemnon in Performance*, eds., E. Hall, F. Macintosh, P. Michelakis & O. Taplin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005b), pp.139-162 (p.158).

by J.J. Bachofen's famous thesis, *Das Mutterrecht*. Bachofen proposed that in ancient times a matriarchal system of social order had been overthrown by patriarchy and that this dramatic change was effectively re-enacted in Aeschylus' *Oresteia.* Bachofen's attempt to pre-figure a matriarchal society had a powerfully subversive impact regarding the history of male power.

For many other male theorists, such as Sigmund Freud, however, Aeschylus's *Oresteia* unproblematically delineated the transition from an irrational matriarchal society to rational patriarchal culture. In other words, the ancient overthrow of matriarchal society could only be seen in terms of progress and development, as Freud outlined in *Moses and Monotheism*:

> Under the influence of external conditions—which we need not follow up here and which in part are also not sufficiently known—it happened that the matriarchal structure of society was replaced by a patriarchal one. This naturally brought with it a revolution in the existing state of the law. An echo of this revolution can still be heard I think, in the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus. The turning from the mother to the father, however, signifies above all a victory of spirituality over the senses—that is to say, a step forward in culture, since maternity is proved by the senses whereas paternity is a surmise based on a deduction and a premise. This declaration in favour of the thought-process, thereby raising it above sense perception, has proved to be a step with serious consequences.[24]

Hélène Cixous, following Melanie Klein, Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett, also suggests that the *Oresteia* marks the dawn of a new era: 'Orestes, neuter, neither masculine nor feminine, half-active, half-passive, neither criminal nor not-guilty, signs the end of the great reign of mothers. Dawn of phallocentrism.'[25] Cixous points out that what Aeschylus's *Oresteia* reveals to us is indeed the triumph and subsequent institutionalization of patriarchal culture: 'patriarchy—political-economy—sexual-economy—it has all sorted itself out since they checkmated those great screeching

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[24] Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* ([S.l.]: Hogarth Press, 1939) in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, in 24 vols., translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud; assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953- 1974), vol., 23, p.153.

[25] In *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir suggests that the Eumenides represents the 'triumph of the patriarchate over the matriarchate...the ancient maternal authority and rights were dead, killed by the audacious revolt of the male!' (London: Vintage, [1949] 1997), p.89. See also Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago, [1970] 1977) and Cixous's 'Sorties' in Cixous and Clément's *The Newly Born Woman* (London: I.B.Tauris,1996), p.100.

females.'[26] Unlike Freud, not every philosopher can conceive of this process in terms of 'progress.'

This moment of violent transition has also been interpreted as a moment of rupture on a wider cultural scale. According to Michelakis, the *Oresteia* and the *Agamemnon* in particular, have come to represent 'the transition from aristocracy to democracy, from monarchy to tyranny, from matriarchy to patriarchy, from the archaic to the classical, from lawlessness to order, and from the primitive to the modern.'[27] Aeschylus' tragic trilogy has not only come to represent (false) notions of progress, but as Cixous suggests, the *Oresteia* can also be seen in terms of nostalgia and loss.

Nevertheless, the central crisis of the trilogy remains the threat posed to the *polis* by Clytemnestra's murder of the king. Goldhill points out that Clytemnestra's murderous actions open 'a vista of violence, obligation, punishment and justice—the very widest dynamics of social order.'[28] Central to the notion of Greek social order is the issue of gender. Clytemnestra's crime is a political act; her assault on the king's body is in effect an assault on the institutions of Greek civilization. However, Clytemnestra's act of regicide is also largely unproductive, for as a Greek woman, Clytemnestra is not allowed to wield the power that she seizes. As McEwan suggests:

> The only way to solve this riddle of power is to find a way to put women into civilization, that is, "inside" the laws. Because women cannot be thus included, they continue to roam the fringes of society, like the wolves howling in the night, waiting, as Clytemnestra did, for the chance to attack their attackers with their own weapons. Of course, when they do that, they do not, paradoxically, show that they deserve what they achieve; rather the very fact of achievement proves they do not deserve it.[29]

The problematic relationship of women to power in European culture is reflected in the conclusion to Aeschylus' play. Indeed, the conclusion to the *Eumenides* is much more equivocal than Freud or Cixous suggests. At the conclusion of Orestes' trial, the votes of the jury are tied. Orestes is not exonerated of his crime. Rather, Athena and the Furies

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[26] Cixous, p.112.
[27] See Pantelis Michelakis's introduction, 'Agamemnons in Performance,' in *Agamemnon in Performance 458BC to AD2004* (see Macintosh above), pp.1-20 (p.6).
[28] Goldhill, *Aeschylus*, p.27.
[29] See Sally McEwan's chapter, 'Oikos, Polis and the Question of Clytemnestra' in *Views of Clytemnestra, Ancient and Modern*, ed. Sally McEwan (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), pp.16-34 (p.30).

agree to restore order and end the cycle of revenge, if the Furies are given a central position in the Athenian *polis*. At the conclusion of the *Oresteia* female figures (virgin and divine) not only save the *polis* from destruction, but also instigate the laws which secure the future of the *polis*. Yet, at the same time, these female deities make the laws which deprive women of exercising political power in the human realm.

As a campaigner for women's rights, it is not difficult to see why Emily Pfeiffer found the female stories of the *Agamemnon* so appealing. In 'Studies from the Antique' Pfeiffer can be seen to examine women's relationship to power and the exclusion of women from socio-political processes. Pfeiffer's sympathetic portrayals of Kassandra and Klytemnestra suggest the pain of disempowerment and the hopelessness of not having a voice in society. Pfeiffer's female figures also represent the strength and courage of the intellectual female who is not only determined to speak her mind, but who is also willing to strike back against patriarchal oppression and exploitation. It is surely no coincidence that Pfeiffer's poetic re-vision of Aeschylus' characters corresponds with the passionate debates about the social and political roles of women in the late nineteenth century.

During the 1870s and 1880s women's groups and organizations began to gain significant ground. For instance, the Ladies National Association grew in strength during the 1880s and successfully campaigned for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s.[30] One other major piece of legislation, which generated much debate, was the Married Women's Property Act of 1882. The Act gave married women the same rights over their property as unmarried women. Wives were no longer forced to confer their earning and property to their husbands and, as *The Times* suggested, the law 'probably portends indirect social effects much greater than the disposition of property, and may in the end pulverize some ideas which have been at the basis of English life.'[31]

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[30] The Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (NARCA) was formed in December 1869. On New Year's Day 1870, one of their first actions was to publish in the Daily News a protest against the Acts. This was signed by women including Florence Nightingale, Josephine Butler, Mary Carpenter, Lydia Becker and drafted by Harriet Martineau and became known as the Ladies' Protest. When the Contagious Diseases Acts were repealed in 1886, the organisation did not end as NARCDA did, but went on to fight for equal moral standards between the sexes as the Ladies National Association for the Abolition of the State Regulation of Vice and for the Promotion of Social Purity. For more information see the archives on the Ladies National Association held at the Women's Library, London.

[31] See reference, 'Wives now able to own their homes' (August, 1882) in *Chronicle of Britain and Ireland,* ed., Henrietta Heald & Derrik Mercer (Farnborough: Chronicle Communications & Jacques Legrand, 1992), p.967.

There is, of course, no evidence Aeschylus recognised and intended to represent the injustices of women's position. Nevertheless, his depiction of such powerful and disturbing female figures in the *Agamemnon* received increasing public and critical attention towards the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the publication of Pfeiffer's twin-sonnets coincides with the re-appearance of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* on the British stage in the late 1860s and early 1880s. Following the successful burlesques of Medea in London in the 1850s, Robert Reece turned his attention to the work of Aeschylus in *Agamemnon and Cassandra; or, The Prophet and Loss of Troy!* (1868). Reece's comedic Agamemnon, audaciously alive at the end of the play, declares: 'If that old Greek—half warrior, half poet—/ Could see his play now, he would hardly know it./ 'Tis but a jest!' A jest it might have been, but it was a wildly successful offering from Reece.

Audiences in Scotland saw the first sombre revivals of Aeschylus' play, with productions by Lewis Campbell and Professor Fleeming Jenkin.[32] But it was a production in Oxford which, as Fiona Macintosh suggests, 'marked a turning point in the performance history of Greek tragedy in Victorian Britain.'[33] In June 1880, Aeschylus' tragedy was staged in the hall of Balliol College at the University of Oxford. Macintosh points out that this production is of enormous importance 'not only because it was the first production of a Greek tragedy in modern times in the original language to receive serious critical attention, but also because the personalities involved continued to promote Greek drama in England long after they had left Oxford.'[34] It is entirely possible that Emily Pfeiffer saw this production at Oxford or at one of the further performances staged at Eton, Harrow, Winchester and St George's Hall, London.

Another crowd favourite was Professor George Warr's production, *Tale of Troy, or Scenes and Tableaux from the Iliad and Odyssey of Homer.* The play was staged over four evenings in both Greek and English in the Odeon of Cromwell House in London in May, 1883. Seated in the audience was none other than the Prime Minister, William Gladstone, who was fortunate enough to be present at what *The Times* described as 'the

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[32] For a good discussion of Jenkin's productions, using Campbell's scripts, see Fiona Macintosh's essay, 'Viewing Agamemnon in Nineteenth-Century Britain,' pp. 139-162.
[33] Macintosh, 'Viewing Agamemnon in Nineteenth-Century Britain,' p.140.
[34] Fiona Macintosh, 'Tragedy in Performance: in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Productions' in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. P.E. Easterling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.290.

first successful attempt to bring the living characters of Homer upon the stage.'[35] The circumstances surrounding the production are more interesting still. As Macintosh points out, Warr, who was Professor of Classics at King's College, London, 'was particularly committed to the higher education of women, and the *Tale of Troy* was staged to raise funds for the foundation of the Women's Department at the College.'[36] The impressive cast and crew of Warr's production were therefore working towards raising funds for the classical education of women at a time when the higher education of women was still a hotly contested issue. The women of Troy could clearly be relied upon to stir the emotions (and the coiffeurs).[37]

According to contemporary wisdom, Aeschylus was in fact envisaged as a particularly emotional writer. Indeed, Jenkyns suggests that throughout the period, Aeschylus was typically referred to as a Gothic or romantic artist.[38] Ironically, the 'romantic' Aeschylus (creator of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon), was beloved by one of the most famous romantic couples of the nineteenth century, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and her husband Robert Browning. As Yopie Prins points out, 'when Robert Browning wrote his first letter to Elizabeth Barrett, she was revising her translation of *Prometheus Bound*.' And, 'as love develops between the two poets, they increasingly translate Aeschylus' text into the context of their courtship,' as this quotation from a letter from Barrett to Browning indicates:

> And tell me too, if Aeschylus is not the divinest of all the divine Greek souls? People say after Quintilian, that he is savage & rude; a sort of Orson, with his locks all wild. But I will not hear it of my master!—He is as strong as Zeus is—& not as a boxer—and tender as Power itself; which always is tenderest.[39]

Prins notes that 'in their repeated references to *Prometheus Bound*, Greek becomes a medium of erotic exchange that sustains their relationship through the *différance* of translation.'[40]

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[35] Review of 'The Tale of Troy' in *The Times* 31st May 1883.
[36] Macintosh, 'Tragedy in Performance: in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Productions,' pp. 293-94.
[37] Warr followed his *Tale of Troy* with an adaptation of Aeschylus trilogy, *Story of Orestes,* in 1886.
[38] Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, p.88.
[39] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, quotation in Prins, 'Elizabeth Barrett, Robert Browning, and the *différance* of translation,' *Victorian Poetry* 29:4 (1991), 435-451 (p.444).
[40] Prins, 'Elizabeth Barrett, Robert Browning, and the *différance* of translation,' p.445.

Barrett Browning's eagerness to explore the possibilities of Aeschylus' rich language was matched by Robert Browning in his translation of the *Agamemnon* (1877). What is most notable about this translation is Browning's strict adherence to Greek syntax. However, this admirable attempt to explore the potential of the English language was ultimately a critical failure, as noted by none other than Augusta Webster. Noting the gender differences in the art of translation, Webster observed: 'the reader who knows no Greek at all will be left bewildered and incredulous...difficult poet as Aeschylus may have been he could never have puzzled Greeks as Englishmen must be puzzled by this.' To drive home her point, a caustic Webster concluded: 'We could wish for nothing better for literature than that Mr. Browning, having translated the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, should go on to translate the *Agamemnon* of Robert Browning.'[41]

Aeschylus had other eminent admirers, including Anna Swanwick and George Eliot. Swanwick, a highly reputed scholar, educationalist and campaigner for women's rights, produced a verse-translation of the *Oresteia* in 1865; a translation of Aeschylus' complete works in 1873, and a much lauded version of the *Agamemnon,* which was performed as the Cambridge Greek Play in 1900. The distinguished Cambridge classicist Sir Richard Jebb considered Swanwick's translation to have 'a genuine sympathy with the original; much poetic feeling; disciplined command of expression; and a fine literary tact.'[42] Despite the plaudits, the work of this fascinating and talented woman of letters has largely disappeared from public consciousness. Yet, Swanwick is an important figure in the history of nineteenth-century Hellenism, not least because she was friends with a network of writers and scholars, which included Tennyson, Bradley and Cooper and Robert Browning.[43]

Multiple factors both within and beyond the academy determined the new vogue for ancient drama in the 1880s, as Macintosh observes: 'the widening of the classical curriculum, the inclusion of women, as well as the broader developments within the professional theatre which allowed both for the power of the burlesque and fostered an

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[41] Augusta Webster, *A Housewife's Opinions* (London: Macmillan, 1879), pp.77-79. See also Hardwick's assessment of Webster's translations in Hardwick, 'Women, Translation and Empowerment' in *Women, Scholarship and Criticism: Gender and Knowledge 1700-1900*, eds. Bellamy, Laurence & Perry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 180-203

[42] Sir Richard Jebb, quotation in a memoir on Swanwick, written by her niece Mary L. Bruce, *Anna Swanwick: A Memoir and Recollections 1813-1899* (London: T. Fisher-Unwin, 1903), p.107.

[43] See Lorna Hardwick's fine essay on Swanwick and Augusta Webster, 'Women, translation and empowerment.'

Plate VII. To the left is Evelyn De Morgan's vision of *Cassandra* (1898), and on the right, with vial in hand, is De Morgan's *Medea* (1889)

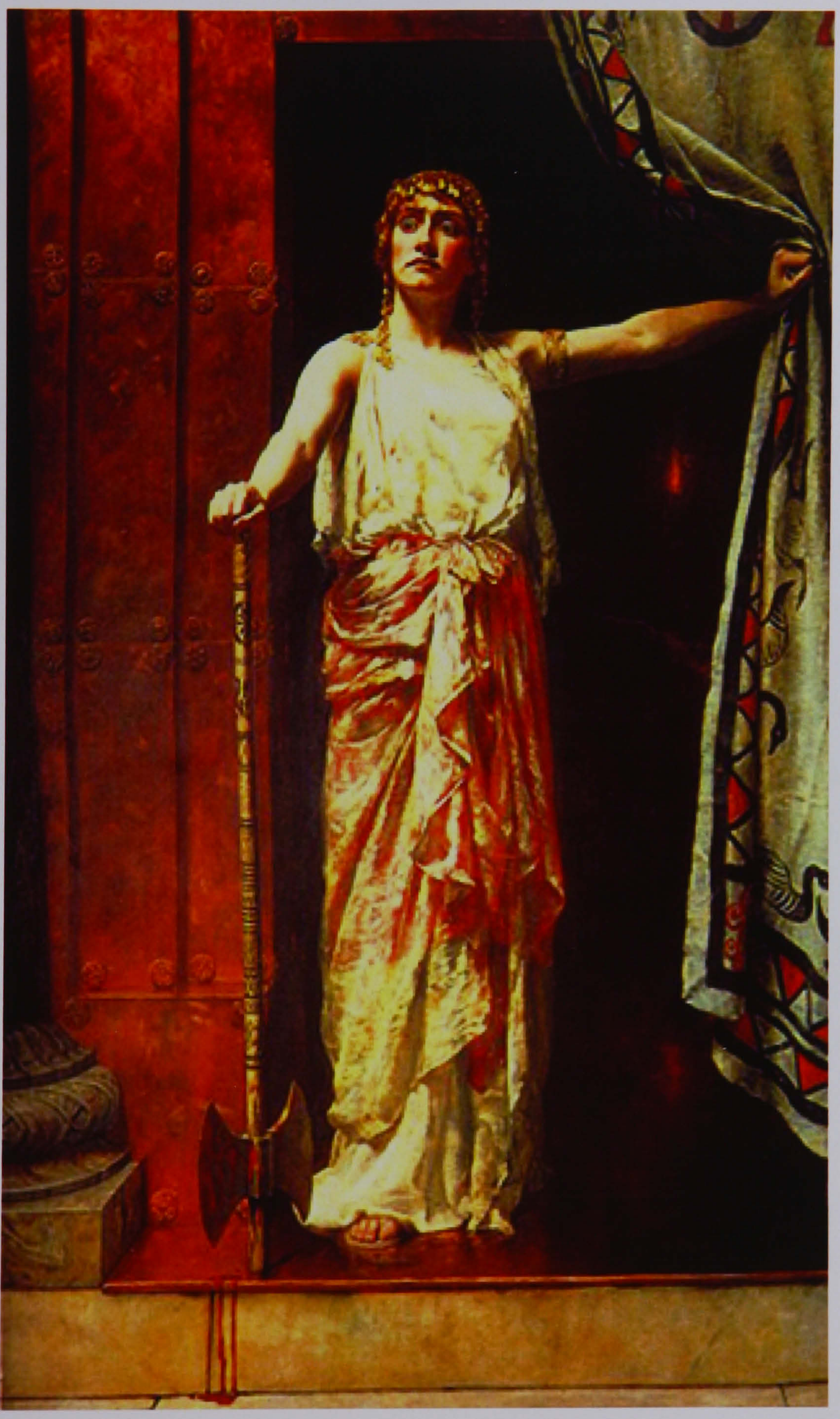

Plate VIII, John Collier's *Clytemnestra* (1882)

interest in music drama.'[44] Furthermore, throughout the 1870s there was extensive media coverage of Schliemann's excavations at Hissarlik and Mycenae, culminating in the discovery of Agamemnon's 'Death-Mask' at Mycenae in February, 1877. The reportage of the archaeological discoveries often tended toward the biographical and sensational. Ancient history was not just fascinating, it was entertaining. As a result, the names of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra can be seen to have become common cultural signs in the late nineteenth century. Despite the overt challenges to Victorian social mores posed by the figures of Clytemnestra and Cassandra, the violent upheavals of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* appealed to late nineteenth-century British audiences. Pfeiffer, with her finger firmly on the pulse of British taste, can certainly be seen to tap into the contemporary fashion for Greek drama.

The fashion for Hellenic figures was, as we have seen, well represented in the art of the period and the Trojan women were no exception. Alongside her vibrant portrayal of Medea, Evelyn Pickering De Morgan produced a compelling image of Cassandra in 1898 (Plate VII). Like Pfeiffer, it seems that De Morgan intended her portrait of the Trojan Princess to be seen alongside another of her historical portraits. In this case, De Morgan chose *Helen of Troy* as the emotional and ideological counterpart of Cassandra.[45] Never one to be overlooked, Clytemnestra was also represented on canvas on numerous occasions throughout the nineteenth century. Frederick Leighton's snappily titled, *Clytemnestra from the Battlements of Argos Watches for the Beacon Fires which are to Announce the Return of Agamemnon*, was completed in 1874. As Leonée and Richard Ormond note, this somewhat gargantuan Clytemnestra is based on the figure of a caryatid. Perhaps as a result, the Greek queen is impressively implacable. However, as the Ormonds point out, 'as a study in revenge the picture is stilted and operatic.'[46] Only her tightly clasped hands and ruffled drapery give a hint to the depth of Clytemnestra's feeling and to the chaos that she will soon instigate.

A more successful, if more sensational, rendering of Clytemnestra was that by John Collier (1887). Collier's bold and brash queen stands on the threshold of the royal palace, bloody axe in hand (Plate VIII). That Collier chose to depict the murder weapon

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[44] Macintosh 'Agamemnon in Nineteenth-Century Britain,' p.141.
[45] De Morgan's paintings are, as Smith suggests, 'obviously pendants: the canvases are essentially the same size, the poses of the standing figures echo each other, and both women are central to the history of the Trojan War.' Smith, *Evelyn De Morgan and the Allegorical Body*, p.92.

is not only significant but symbolically loaded. As Michelakis notes, 'Clytemnestra's weapon has turned into a symbol for the fears, needs, and desires projected onto its holder.'[47] For instance, post-Freud Clytemnestra's weapon is very often a phallic sword, symbolising her transgression of gender norms and the threat posed to patriarchal order by her androgynous character. Whereas in more anthropological, feminist or Marxist based productions, the queen's weapon is often a primitive, barbaric tool, 'an emblem of the pre-patriarchal world associated with the mother principle.'[48] More recently, Clytemnestra has been seen swinging an axe. The double-headed axe, known as either a *pelekus* or *labrys* was, in ancient Greece, a male weapon of war. However, as Komar observes, contemporary women writers have adopted the axe as a symbol, marking Clytemnestra's connection to earlier female deities and her violent resistance.[49] Clytemnestra's appropriation of a (fe)male weapon is therefore significant on a number of levels, not least because, as Michelakis wryly observes, the size of the axe provides 'a perfect yardstick for measuring the monstrosity of Clytemnestra's crime.'[50] Collier's axe is really very long indeed. In fact, the axe is almost as tall as Clytemnestra herself. Collier's queen might, therefore, not only be seen as shameless, but also as something of an exhibitionist.

William Blake Richmond produced another emotive painting based on the Agamemnon. The painting, exhibited at the Royal Academy, is a brilliant study focusing exclusively on the reactions of an ancient Athenian audience to Aeschylus' play. Perhaps what is most interesting about the picture is that Richmond had to rely on the infamy of Clytemnestra's actions for the painting to work. In other words, a late Victorian audience had to be sufficiently familiar with the play so that they could not only identify the audience's responses but relate to them. Pfeiffer employs a similar technique to Richmond in that she heavily relies on her audience's knowledge of Aeschylus's trilogy and Homer's *Iliad*. As a result, Pfeiffer not only challenges expectations, but to a knowledgeable audience, her poetic revisionism is strikingly evident.

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[46] Leonée and Richard Ormond, *Lord Leighton* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1975), p.89.
[47] Michelakis, 'Agamemnons in Performance,' p.13.
[48] Michelakis, 'Agamemnons in Performance,' p.13.
[49] Kathleen Komar, *Reclaiming Klytemnestra: Revenge or Reconciliation* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), pp. 24-25.
[50] Michelakis, 'Agamemnons in Performance,' p.13.

Making Silence Speak: Kassandra's Burning Words

The mythmaking surrounding Cassandra began over two and a half thousand years ago. In *The Iliad* Cassandra is described as King Priam's 'loveliest daughter,' and her hand in marriage is promised to Othryoneus, one of the brave Trojan fighters who falls in battle. She is a princess and a 'free woman' in the *Iliad,* not the pitiful suppliant that Aeschylus later portrays in the *Oresteia*. Homer also provides an outline for Cassandra's murder in the *Odyssey*, (II. 421-423), but it is Aeschylus who, in the *Agamemnon*, has largely determined her tragic story. In Aeschylus's representation, Cassandra is a truly tragic figure that is violated, taken as a spoil of war, disbelieved and isolated and eventually murdered. On the face of it, Cassandra appears to be the female victim *par excellence*. One might consider, therefore, that Cassandra's tragic story leaves little scope for feminist revisionism.

Cassandra may have been mythologically victimized, but she has proven to be a powerful figure for female artists and writers in more recent times. The key element of Cassandra's representation is that of her silenced prophetic voice. Her 'gift' is noted in a number of accounts including those of Apollodorus and Pausanias.[51] According to tradition, Cassandra's gift of prophecy was bestowed on her as a child by the god Apollo. As a young woman, Apollo demanded that Cassandra have sex with him, or else he would revoke his gift to her. Cassandra refused the god and as punishment Apollo is said to have spat in her mouth, thereby corrupting her voice and making her prophecies unintelligible. Consequently Cassandra's fate has been seen by subsequent generations as a metaphor for oppressed women, who struggle to make their voice heard in the cultural and political arenas.

The issue of enforced silence is a crucial theme with regard to female writers and feminists of the late nineteenth century. Whilst demonstrating her right to represent Cassandra, Emily Pfeiffer does not endow her female sage with a voice in the text. That Kassandra does not speak directly to us not only suggests her status as a cultural construction, but also suggests the frustrations of the silenced intelligent woman and impossibility of an unmediated female voice from the past. However, by employing a

variety of narrative strategies, Pfeiffer re-places female experience at the centre of her text. As a result, Pfeiffer suggests how powerful female figures can be re-claimed by women for women. Through her clever use of the twin-sonnet, Pfeiffer is also able to generate sympathy and outrage for the continually abused and misrepresented Kassandra.

In Pfeiffer's paired sonnets we get a vision of Kassandra rarely seen, that of a happy and sexually fulfilled young woman, before the fall of Troy. Indeed, Pfeiffer challenges Cassandra's mythological reputation as seen in the plays of Aeschylus and Euripides. In Euripides's *Trojan Women,* for example, Poseidon reveals that in the Shrine of Athena, 'that Aias [Ajax] tore Cassandra thence' (I, 70). The violated maid is then 'forced to a dishonoured wedlock' with Agamemnon, who has become enchanted by the frenzied Trojan. A wild Cassandra, driven insane by her suffering at the hands of Apollo, Ajax and Agamemnon, declares revenge on the Acheans for her rape and the rape of Ilium. Cassandra finally leaves the stage, enraged and vengeful but still proud, on her way to captivity. Conversely, in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, the commander of the Achaean army takes Cassandra back to Greece as his 'spear-prize,' for his glorious victory over the forces of Troy. As she is dragged to Agamemnon's royal palace Cassandra foresees her own death and the death of the king. She tries, in vain, to warn the king of the impending danger, but Apollo has already corrupted her prophetic voice. A dissenting Cassandra enters the palace in full knowledge of her imminent death at the hands of Clytemnestra.

Abducted from her home and country, Cassandra has no protection from kinship structures, or from (defeated) male relatives. She has, in other words, no rights and no form of self-defence. Cassandra is first caught in a war and then in a vicious battle between the sexes. Both Aeschylus and Euripides had first-hand experience of war and its consequences and both playwrights knew how to evoke the cruelty of war. Pfeiffer is less concerned with the epic campaign of the Greeks and far more concerned with the costs of conflict, specifically in relation to women. Indeed, in choosing to represent Kassandra and Klytemnestra through a (female) narrator, rather than in monologue form, Pfeiffer is able to universalize their stories. Cassandra/Kassandra is utterly failed by men, human and divine. Violated and mistreated, she is unable to tell her own story. But her sister poet, Emily Pfeiffer, is more than capable of representing her suffering.

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[51] See Apollodorus (III), Pausanias (II.16, III.19, V.26) and Hyginus, *Fabulae* (93).

The first section of the poem details Kassandra's seduction by the god Apollo. As I have already indicated, Pfeiffer's portrayal of a youthful, carefree Kassandra is something of a radical departure. Pfeiffer makes a further innovation in that her Kassandra is more of a sexual libertine than violated maid:

I.

VIRGIN of Troy, the days were well with thee
When wandering singing by the singing streams
Of Ilion, thou beheldest the golden gleams
Of the bold sun that might not facèd be,
Come murmuring to thy feet caressingly;
But best that day when, steeped in noontide dreams,
The young Apollo wrapped thee in his beams,
And quenched his love in thine as in the sea!

And later, in thy tower 'twas sweet to teach
The loveless night the joys high day had known;
To dream, to wake—and find thy love impeach
Late sleep with kisses, and thy spirit flown
To his, and at the ivory gates of speech
Breaking in words as burning as his own.[52]

In referring to Kassandra as a virgin, Pfeiffer immediately underlines the Trojan maid's status, in terms of her relations to men and the wider community. As a young, royal maid Kassandra is supposed to abide by the feminine virtues of abstinence and self-sacrifice. But as a devotee of Apollo, Kassandra has more to offer the god than her spiritual devotion.

Traditionally, Apollo is not known for endorsing equal-opportunities. In the *Oresteia,* for example, it is Apollo who encourages Orestes to kill Clytemnestra and it is Apollo who defends Orestes' actions to the court of Athena. As part of his defence of Orestes' matricide, Apollo makes his feelings toward women known:

The woman you call the mother of the child
Is not the parent, just a nurse to the seed,
The new-sown seed that grows and swells inside her.
The man is the source of life—the one who mounts.
She, like a stranger for a stranger, keeps
The shoot alive unless god hurts the roots.[53]

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[52] Pfeiffer, *Sonnets, revised and enlarged* (London: Field & Tuer, 1886), p.67.

Apollo's disrespect for women is also evident in his treatment of Cassandra. In the *Oresteia,* as Fagles observes, first Apollo exploits Cassandra as his medium, then he destroys her, 'treads [her] down—his service is a rape.'[54] Kovacs also determines that the Cassandra of the *Agamemnon* is, in the first instance, violated by the god, who she then betrays.[55] Cassandra's confession to the Chorus seems to support such a reading:

> CASSANDRA: He came like a wrestler
> magnificent, took me down and breathed his fire
> through me and—
> CHORUS: You bore him a child?
> CASSANDRA: I yielded,
> then, at the climax, I recoiled— I deceived Apollo!
> (1211-1214)

Unlike Aeschylus, Pfeiffer does not depict a scene of violent violation. Rather, Pfeiffer elects to represent the moment when Kassandra *chooses* to become an actively sexual woman. As an erotic figure, Pfeiffer's prophetess seems to follow another ancient model.

From the brief glimpse of Cassandra in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* and in *Trojan Women* Cassandra is intensely devoted to her god, Apollo. Indeed, in *Iphigenia* Cassandra is more of a sensual figure than a pitiful suppliant: 'Cassandra/ Adorned with a garland of green laurel/ Tosses her bright locks, when the god/ Breathes on her the compulsions of prophecy.'[56] Similarly, in Euripides's *Trojan Women* Cassandra openly declares her physical fidelity to Apollo:

> O garlands of the god who is dearest to me, you joyful emblems of his worship, fare you well. I have left the festivals in which I once found joy. Away with you! I tear you from my body—so that while my flesh is still pure, I may give them to the winds to carry to you, O lord of prophecy.[57]

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[53] Extract from the *Eumenides* (666-671).
[54] Fagles in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, p.36
[55] Kovacs cited by Rush Rehm in, 'Epilogue: Cassandra—The Prophet Unveiled' in *Agamemnon in Performance*, eds. Hall, Macintosh, Michelakis & Taplin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.343-358 (p.354).
[56] *Iphigenia in Aulis* (757-61). See *Orestes and Other Plays*, translated & introduced by Phillip Vellacott (Penguin, London: 1972).

Pfeiffer's Kassandra may, therefore, be seen as more Euripidean than Aeschylean in terms of her sexual expressiveness.

Pfeiffer suggests that Kassandra is willingly seduced by the 'young Apollo,' who gently caresses the maid before he becomes subsumed in and by her. Moreover, the relationship is envisaged in the courtly love tradition. Kassandra dreams of the young god in her tower, which he mysteriously enters, unseen. The tryst reaches its dramatic climax, when, seemingly at the point of orgasm, Kassandra is suddenly infused with the gift of prophecy. Kassandra's moment of sexual awakening is certainly revealing. By endowing Kassandra with prophetic powers, Apollo can be seen to have rewarded, or even compensated the young woman for the loss of her virginity. Kassandra has not only been given the power of expressivity that is on a par with (divine) masculine abilities, her 'gift' also allows her to see into the future as well as into the past. However, Kassandra's 'power' is inextricably linked to her sexuality. In antiquity, as in Victorian England, women's sexuality was regulated and controlled by men. Kassandra's 'gift' of prophecy is merely another means by which Apollo can seek to manipulate her. As the phrase suggests, Kassandra's 'burning words' will prove to be a mixed blessing.

In representing the ancient Trojan seer, Pfeiffer can be seen to co-opt elements of nineteenth-century 'sage discourse.' Throughout the nineteenth century, the figure of the sage became increasingly prominent. As Carol Christ notes, the expansion of the periodical press gave rise to a new class of writers, whom the Victorians called 'Men of Letters.' It was these 'Men' whom Thomas Carlyle described as Priests and sages in his influential essay, 'The Hero as Man of Letters' (1841):

> Men of Letters are a perpetual Priesthood, from age to age, teaching all Men that a God is still present in their life…In the true Literary Man there is thus ever, acknowledged or not by the world, a sacredness: he is the light of the world; the world's Priest;—guiding it, like a sacred Pillar of Fire, in its dark pilgrimage through the waste of Time.[58]

Carlyle advocated what Christ calls a 'strenuously masculine ideal' of the sage and sage writing: 'Carlyle's hero as man of letters was not specifically a writer of non-fiction

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[57] *Trojan Women* (451-56). See *Euripides The Trojan Women and Other Plays*, translated by James Morwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[58] 'The Hero as Man of Letters: Johnson, Rousseau, Burns' in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman & Hall, [1841], 1897).

prose. He was, however, emphatically a man.'[59] Despite the uncertainty of what exactly constituted 'sage writing' the notion of the sage as a 'masculine' man of letters dominated the nineteenth century and continued well into the twentieth century.[60]

But what was it, exactly, that distinguished the 'sage' from other writers? According to George Landow, 'sage writing is a form of post-romantic nonfictional prose characterized by a congeries of techniques borrowed, usually quite self-consciously, from Old Testament prophecy, particularly as it was understood in the nineteenth century.'[61] By self-consciously and aggressively setting themselves in opposition to contemporary society, 'especially to its rulers or priests,' the sage spoke 'from off-centre or in a deliberately eccentric manner.'[62] Far more concerned with the present than any remote future, the nineteenth-century sage would choose a contemporary social issue or 'sign of the times' as the focus of his attack. He would then suggest that this phenomenon was 'a symptom of a falling away from the paths of God and nature.' The sage would then predict a calamitous disaster if his peers refused to change their behaviour. Finally, the sage would call for a collective 'spiritual awakening' and would offer a vision of social bliss, if the audience would only return to the forgotten path.[63]

The Scottish writer Charles Mackay can certainly be seen to adopt the voice of the seer, if not the voice of Cassandra, in a poem entitled 'Cassandra' from his *Studies from the Antique* (1864):

> We live in a time of sorrow,
> When men have no thought but of money,
> And carnal delights it will bring them,
> Of mansions and horses and statues,
> And power to out glitter their neighbours;
> When women are slaves to their raiment,
> And prattle all day about nothings:
> Unless they do worse, and out-babble

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[59] See Carol T. Christ's essay, '"The Hero as Man of Letters" Masculinity and Victorian Nonfiction Prose,' in *Victorian Sages & Cultural Discourse* ed., Thaïs Morgan (New Brunswick; London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp.19-31(p.20).

[60] John Holloway set the trend for 'sage discourse' with his book *The Victorian Sage* (London: Macmillan, 1953). Recent studies have attempted to interrogate and complicate the notion of 'the sage,' particularly in relation to gender.

[61] See George P. Landow's important essay, 'Aggressive (Re)interpretations of the Female Sage: Florence Nightingale's Cassandra' in *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse* (see Christ above), pp.32-45 (p.33).

[62] Landow, p.34.

[63] I am paraphrasing Landow's definition of the quadripartite structure of nineteenth-century sage discourse. Landow also suggests that sage writing might include grotesque analogies and satiric definition of key terms.

The preachers of bloodshed and hatred.
A time, a time when the high and low
Shall share in the pitiless overthrow
Woe to the nations! Woe to them! Woe!

Mackay's apocalyptic vision stresses the need for social and political revolution, as the leaders of these hapless nations, 'scarcely conceal from the people/ The fact that they prophesy falsely.' Mackay's prophetic words are supposed to represent transcendental truths in the face of political falsehoods. In this instance, Mackay alludes to the classical authority of Cassandra, in order to cement his own position as a Victorian seer.

It is interesting to note that a number of nineteenth-century male writers who also wrote poems on Cassandra did so from a first-person perspective. Oliver Wendell Holmes and William Courthope, for instance, both employed the dramatic 'I,' in their representations of the Trojan prophetess. George Simcox, Winthrop Praed, William Bennett and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, on the other hand, begin their poems in the third-person, only to shift to first-person narration part way through. In effect, these male writers put words into the mouth of Cassandra; they speak as and for her.

Cassandra's 'burning words' were also subjects for other influential writers like Tennyson and George Meredith.[64] Interestingly, Tennyson elected not to treat Cassandra directly, but through the figure of the Trojan maid Oenone. Tennyson repeatedly revised 'Oenone' between its first publication in 1833 and its subsequent publication in 1842. As Richard Cronin observes, 'Tennyson, in rewriting his poems, was self-consciously remaking himself, transforming himself from the poet of 1833 volume, the poet of a sect, the laureate of the Apostles, into a poet who could speak to a nation.'[65] Between revisions, therefore, Tennyson was honing his own prophetic voice. Yet, Tennyson's own difficult relationship to the figure of the seer clearly prevented him from confidently

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[64] Meredith's Aeschylean lyric sequence, entitled 'Cassandra' (1861), highlights the inevitable demise of Agamemnon's 'Asian tempest-star.' Fate is the driving force of Meredith's poem and the never-ending cycle of violence and revenge is seemingly inescapable. Rossetti's 'Cassandra' (1869) is said to have been inspired by Meredith's poem on the fallen woman of Troy. In a letter, Meredith implied that Rossetti was so impressed by his lyric that he intended to produce a painting, based on the imagery of the poem. However, as Carl Peterson suggests, 'though inspired by Meredith's "Cassandra,"' Rossetti's drawing does not so much "illustrate" Meredith's poem 'as use it as a point of departure for pictorial composition replete with anachronistic catapults that is partly Meredithian and partly Homeric, but wholly Rossettian.' See Carl A. Peterson, 'The Iliad, George Meredith's "Cassandra" and D.G. Rossetti's "Cassandra" Drawing' in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 7 (1965), 329-337 (336).

[65] See Richard Cronin, '"Oenone" and Apostolic Politics: 1830-1832' in *Victorian Poetry* 30:3/4 (1992), 229-246 (243).

appropriating Cassandra's voice. Indeed, in terms of the 'masculinity' of the sage, Tennyson has been accused of falling far short of the literary ideal. Linda M. Shires explains Tennyson's paradoxical position: 'he [Tennyson] was indubitably a Sage, even if not included in John Holloway's 1953 analysis...Yet as a male aesthete who started his career by insisting on the autonomy of art, Tennyson also courted his own feminization.'[66] However, Tennyson's status as Poet Laureate guaranteed his position as *the* sage of the Victorian age.

One man who was confident speaking as Cassandra was the actor J.F. Crace. Importantly, Crace delivered his performance in the dead language of ancient Greek. *The Times* considered Crace's performance in the Cambridge Greek Play of 1900 as 'most impressive.' He was also singled out for his appearance, his gestures and for the notable declamations of his character.[67] Later, W. Le B. Egerton, of Trinity College, Cambridge, was also lauded for his success in portraying the ancient seer. The *Daily Telegraph* reflected on Egerton's 'tour de force' as follows: 'It is really difficult to believe when Cassandra is on the stage that she is a man at all. Mr. Egerton manages his voice with extraordinary cleverness.'[68] Egerton clearly beguiled his audience, not just as a seer, but as a woman.

Female actors also faced the difficult proposition of performing Cassandra's burning words. In Warr's *Tale of Troy* Eugenie Sellers played Cassandra. Described by *Vanity Fair* as one of the 'lovely women rolling out hexameters,' Seller's voice clearly had an impact. For his next production, *Story of Orestes*, Warr chose Dorothy Dene to play the role of Cassandra. *The Illustrated London News* applauded Dene for playing 'Cassandra with real fire.' Dene was seen to be 'absorbed in the contemplation of a great subject and 'lost in the passion of her personation.'[69] To be a successful seer, it seems, one needed to be as frenzied as the mythological Cassandra.

Perhaps the most famous invocations and impersonations of Cassandra in the nineteenth century was that by Florence Nightingale. Nightingale's essay, entitled 'Cassandra,' does not mention the sage from antiquity directly. But as George Landow

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[66] See Linda M. Shires article 'Rereading Tennyson's Gender Politics' in *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse* (see Christ above), pp.46-65 (p.47). See Cronin, '"Oenone" and Apostolic Politics: 1830-1832' in *Victorian Poetry* 30 (1992), p.243.
[67] *The Times*, November 19, 1900.
[68] The *Daily Telegraph*, March 7, 1921.
[69] *Illustrated London News*, May 22, 1886, p524.

points out, in thus entitling her work, Nightingale 'aligns herself with a mythic figure who blends the Old Testament prophet and a Victorian woman's version of the experience of privileged but suffering isolation.'[70] To underline her exceptional status, Nightingale begins her essay with the following statement: 'One often comes to be thus wandering alone in the bitterness of life without.' 'Such a one' Nightingale declares, 'sees the evil they do not see.' As Landow suggests, 'Cassandra's combination of prophetic vision, alienation, and ambiguity well embodies the position of the woman who seeks to be a Victorian sage.'[71] The distant figure from antiquity proved to be the perfect persona for an intellectual woman who wished to distance herself from her peers, in order to speak passionately and publicly about contemporary issues.

Importantly, the essay which is now *Cassandra* had originally been intended to be an autobiographical novel. In its first version, *Cassandra* is narrated not by Nightingale, nor Cassandra, but by the voice of a Venetian princess, Nofriani. The heroine complains of her life to her brother Fariseo in a series of dramatic monologues, which are intended to form a critique of contemporary life. Over a number of years, *Cassandra* was de-personalized and heavily amended by Nightingale in order to universalize the experience of the young tragic heroine. The subsequent essay, published in 1918, is a passionate exposition on the frustrated and inhibitive condition of (middle-class) women's lives in mid-nineteenth century England. In the event, the pronouncements of Nightingale, the self-proclaimed Victorian sage, were not heard for over fifty years.

In *Cassandra,* Nightingale asks a series of key questions, which are curiously reminiscent of Xantippe's questioning of Socrates in Levy's monologue. For instance, in the opening section Nightingale enquires, 'why have women passion, intellect, moral activity— these three—and a place in society where no one of the three can be exercised?'[72] Answering her own questions, Nightingale responds: 'Passion, intellect, moral activity—these three have never been satisfied in woman. In this cold and oppressive atmosphere, they cannot be satisfied.'[73] In the following seven sections, Nightingale re-claims the right to complain and to recommend, as only a sage can.

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[70] Landow, p.41.
[71] Landow, p.42.
[72] All quotations will be taken from Nightingale's republished essay. *Cassandra and Other Selections from Suggestions for Thought*. ed. Mary Poovey (London: Pickering & Chatto, [1918] 1991), p.205.
[73] Nightingale. p.208.

Landow argues that Nightingale's work marks a significant shift in sage writing, in that post-*Cassandra* sage writing becomes a genre that is no longer determined by gender: 'the prophetic tradition had always been fundamentally aggressive—and fundamentally patriarchal. By writing as a female sage, Nightingale in one stroke makes the sage's aggressiveness no longer the sole property of men.'[74] The great irony is that, as Showalter points out, Nightingale made extensive revisions in her manuscript 'in an effort to soften its antagonisms': 'vital pieces of her argument were ruthlessly cut because they were too revealing, too forceful, or too "crazy."' Showalter concludes that the manuscript of *Cassandra* is a 'sad paradigm of Victorian female self-censorship.'[75]

That Nightingale was perhaps concerned about appearing 'too crazy' adds another layer to this complex essay. The link between women and irrationality was as strong in the nineteenth century as it was in ancient Greece. And, as the century progressed, the issue of hysteria received increasing attention, as Elaine Showalter observes:

> During the decades from 1870-1910, middle-class women were beginning to organize in behalf of higher education, entrance to the professions, and political rights. Simultaneously, the female nervous disorders of anorexia nervosa, hysteria and neurasthenia became epidemic; and the Darwinian "nerve specialist" arose to dictate proper feminine behaviour outside the asylum as well as in, to differentiate treatments for "nervous" women of various class backgrounds, and to oppose women's efforts to change the condition of their lives.[76]

In other words, as the figure of the professional (speaking) woman rose to prominence, so did the figure of the female hysteric. As Showalter suggests, 'the rise of the Victorian madwoman was one of history's self-fulfilling prophecies.'[77]

Claire Kahane raises the interesting point that *Cassandra* was written just before Nightingale took to her bed with what might be characterized as a hysterical illness. Furthermore, Kahane argues that the text of *Cassandra* 'bears the classic marks of a hysterical discourse, riven by contradictory passions, digressive, fragmentary, inconsistent in its voice and subject position, a text that Lytton Strachey aptly

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[74] Landow, p.41.
[75] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), p.66.
[76] Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p.18.
[77] Showalter, *The Female Malady*, pp. 72-73.

characterized as a *cri de coeur* even though it had undergone repeated revisions.'[78] Yet, Nightingale's fragmented essay is not only representative of her own intense feelings; it also represents the potential dangers facing intellectually and physically inert women.

The social and cultural values of the time which dictated that middle-class women should be largely confined to indoor spaces and menial tasks were perceived by Nightingale to engender mental and physical exhaustion and enervation: 'The accumulation of nervous energy, which has had nothing to do during the day, makes them feel every night, when they go to bed, as if they were going mad; and they are obliged to lie long in bed in the morning to let it evaporate and keep it down.'[79] In another particularly powerful passage Nightingale describes the demeaning practice of being 'read aloud to': 'It is like lying on one's back, with one's hands tied and having liquid poured down one's throat. Worse than that, because suffocation would immediately ensue and put a stop to this operation. But no suffocation would stop the other.'[80] Shockingly, Nightingale's description of feeling forcibly restrained was experienced as reality by female suffragettes on hunger-strike in 1912. Labelled as hysterics, the political protesters were physically restrained and forced-fed by doctors in the cells of Holloway jail.

One of the most forceful sections in *Cassandra* is Nightingale's plea for women to grasp the transformative power of pain and suffering, over the debilitating effects of silence and inaction: 'Give us back our suffering, we cry to heaven in our hearts—suffering rather than indifferentism, for out of nothing comes nothing. But out of suffering may come the cure. Better have pain than paralysis!'[81] Nightingale understood the pain of passivity. Moreover, Nightingale knew that illness, imagined or real, was not a means to equality, nor was it an effective form of protest. Kahane notes that 'although Nightingale herself refused the label *feminist, Cassandra* turned rage into outrage and thus turned the hysterical complaint to political account.'[82]

Like Nightingale, Pfeiffer was outraged at the social, political and educational restrictions placed on women. In 'Kassandra' Pfeiffer not only highlights the censorship

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[78] Claire Kahane, *Passions of the Voice: Hysteria, Narrative and the Figure of the Speaking Woman 1850-1915* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p.47.
[79] Nightingale, p.221.
[80] Nightingale, p.213.
[81] Nightingale, p.208.
[82] Kahane, *Passions of the Voice*, p.53.

of the public female voice, but also the price of political inaction. Pfeiffer's aim in representing Kassandra is not force words into Cassandra's mouth. Rather, in order to demonstrate her point, Pfeiffer represents Kassandra's frustrated speech and the disdainful treatment she suffers by those who dismiss her prophecies as 'madness.' Kassandra has the ability to see the truth beyond the façade, but her wisdom is lost, as Apollo's act of linguistic rape obscures her visions and cries for help:

II.

How far from Ilion, and how far from joy,
Captive Kassandra, wert thou, when in sight
Of conquering Greece thou satest on thy height
Of shame—a waif from out the wreck of Troy!
Thine still the burning word, but slave's employ
Had from thy trembling lip effacèd quite
The kisses of the god, and heaven's light
Now shone upon thee only to destroy.

For thee, sun-stricken one, th' abysmal sties
Of sin lay open as the secret grave—
Things of which speech seemed madness—while thy Cries
On wronged Apollo lost the way to save;
Till at the last, the faith of upturned eyes
Brought him to right, as death to free the slave.[83]

A feature that Pfeiffer's sonnets share with those of Dante Gabriel Rossetti is that Rossetti always represented a clear stanzic gap in his sonnets. The effect of the gap not only heightens the sense of restrictive poetic space, but also underlines the inherent doubleness of the form, as the gap denies unity. The split sonnet may reflect a moment of discursive crisis, as the capacity to coherently tell Kassandra's story breaks down. The narrative sequence is suddenly disrupted, temporally and geographically, as Kassandra is transplanted from Ilion and a state of post-coital bliss, to Greece and a state of abject subjugation. The division between the first and second sonnet and the stanzic gaps also effectively represents Kassandra's sudden estrangement from Apollo. Furthermore, these shifts in time and place not only suggest Kassandra's abrupt change in circumstance, but also her psychic distress and emotional fragmentation.

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[83] Pfeiffer, *Sonnets*, p.68.

Contrary to (male) convention, Pfeiffer does *not* depict Kassandra as a mad-woman. Rather, her prophetic speech 'seemed madness.' Nevertheless, the frustrated speech of Kassandra can be seen to reflect contemporary debates on hysteria. Indeed, one is tempted to compare the character of Kassandra with the famous late-nineteenth-century cases of Anna O. and Dora.[84] Among Anna's 'hysterical' symptoms was an inability to effectively communicate in her native German. At times of extreme anxiety, Anna's tendency for polylingualism became simply unintelligible. Dora's symptoms, on the other hand, included dyspnea, migraine headaches, an occasional limp and periodic attacks of coughing, which were often accompanied by a complete loss of voice. Freud interpreted the 'hysterical' symptoms of both women in terms of sexual repression. Thus, Freud's own fragmented narrative on hysteria formed the basis of his early psychoanalytic theories. But, as Kahane observes, the cases of Anna O. and especially Dora, raise political and theoretical issues which extend far beyond diagnoses of hysteria: 'Dora is thus no longer read as merely a case history or a fragment of an analysis of hysteria but as an urtext in the history of woman, a fragment of an increasingly heightened critical debate about the meaning of sexual difference and its effects on the representations of feminine desire.'[85] For instance, recent feminist critics like Kahane highlight the importance of rage to hysterical symptomatology.[86] Further, contemporary theorists like Clément and Cixous re-present the figure of the hysteric as a subversively powerful (Western) cultural icon.[87]

Pfeiffer was alert to the sexual politics of hysteria and rage, as can be seen from this extract from *Women and Work*:

> Of hysterics among women I am persuaded that a great deal more is heard than seen, and that the disease is unknown among those who have found work fitted to their powers; but the language is sadly in want of some term which would imply

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[84] Josef Breuer began his analysis of 'Anna,' the pseudonym of Bertha Pappenheim, in 1880. Freud began his treatment of 'Dora,' Ida Bauer, in the autumn of 1900. Although the two analysts published their work separately, Breuer and Freud collaborated to produce the now famous volume, *Studies in Hysteria* (unpublished, 1895).

[85] Claire Kahane, 'Introduction: Part Two' in, *In Dora's Case: Freud—Hysteria—Feminism*,' eds. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, [1985] 1990), pp.19-34 (p.31).

[86] For a good discussion of rage in relation to hysteria see Kahane's *Passions of the Voice*, especially chapter three.

[87] Importantly, Clément also notes the profoundly negative connotations surrounding the hysteric: 'the hysteric, metaphor of the petite bourgeoisie, is a prisoner,' she does not have any 'liberating powers other than to reread the past.' Clément in *The Newly Born Woman*, p.56.

> the same phase of emotional outbreak in the other sex. In view of the derivation of the word "hysteria," the properties of speech forbid us to call the utter loss of mental balance which is seen in the half-childish, half-animal rage of men, often provoked by the merest trifles, by that name; but such exhibitions are very certainly the brutal analogue of the more purely nervous affection, and are of much more frequent occurrence.[88]

The majority of Pfeiffer's *Women and Work* is dedicated to challenging the claims of anti-feminists, who cited women's mental and physical 'unfitness' for work and higher education. In a similar vein, Pfeiffer's complex sonnets effectively peal back the layers of myth involved in Kassandra's mythological 'madness,' to reveal their ideological function. Again, like Nightingale, Pfeiffer reclaims women's right to rage against their condition. Such speech has a radically disruptive potential.

Paradoxically, Apollo's vicious attack on Kassandra's ability to represent herself can be seen to establish the basis for a new female form of speech. Kassandra is not, necessarily, a slave to her broken speech; she may be seen as a master of a new communicative process. Kassandra's transcendental ability, which allows her to 'see' beyond conventional restrictions of space and time, provides her with an invaluable link to other women. She is able to observe, foretell and record women's experiences. Kassandra is not confined to male-dominated systems of knowledge and language. Breaking through the 'ivory gates' of (male-dominated) speech, Kassandra is a fully-fledged seer. And it is as a seer that Kassandra is most transgressive and threatening to the (gendered) social order. Kassandra's prophecies not only refute notions of male mastery, but as a sage, Kassandra has mastery over male discourse. Furthermore, like a poet, Kassandra's prophecies are full of word-play. She has been freed from male forms of language and knowledge and she is able to express herself differently. That Pfeiffer believed in the veracity and authority of the poet-come-seer can be seen from this extract from her travelogue *Flying Leaves*:

> Poetry is, in sooth, the most essential form of truth, a faint adumbration of the mind of the Highest...However, wild and lawless in their lives and mere personal speech, they become sane when their singing robes are fairly on, and they are lifted to the height which is to them the height of vision.[89]

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[88] Emily Pfeiffer, *Women and Work* (London: Trübner & co., 1888), p.170.
[89] Pfeiffer, *Flying Leaves*, p.62.

Pfeiffer goes on to suggest that 'we will trust our causes, all causes to the poets, the *Seers*; for, of all human witness, theirs alone is true.'[90]

For Liza Maurizio, Aeschylus positions Cassandra outside any interpretative community of believers: 'with Cassandra, Aeschylus emphasizes that a community that does not, cannot, or refuses to "read between the lines" of a speech that does not conform to acceptable norms of speaking, because of either ambiguity or clarity, in effect kills that speech by rendering it meaningless, and hence kills the speaker.'[91] In re-presenting Kassandra's story in sonnet form, Pfeiffer effectively replaces Kassandra within an interpretive community. Pfeiffer's audience is supposed to read between the lines, to decipher Kassandra's obscured message. For Pfeiffer, Kassandra is the tragic poet of the *Oresteia* and she certainly condemns Apollo with her burning words.

Crucially, Pfeiffer fails to explain the sudden rift between the Trojan princess and her lover Apollo.[92] According to legend, Apollo punishes Cassandra for denying his sexual advances. In the *Agamemnon*, for example, the chorus asks, "Did you come to the act of getting children, as is the way?" To which Cassandra replies: "I played Loxias false," and "I could make none believe me, once I committed this offence" (1207-13). In Pfeiffer's poem, Apollo has, once again, seemingly been 'wronged' by the manipulative, coquettish Kassandra: 'while thy Cries/ On wronged Apollo lost the way to save.' Pfeiffer's tone in the final sestet must surely be sardonic. In light of the first stanza, it seems unlikely that this Kassandra would deny Apollo anything— least of all her body.

Apollo's sudden abandonment of Kassandra therefore seems inexplicable. However, Pfeiffer reveals in the final lines the spurious reasons for the god's cruelty. In becoming a powerful female prophet, Kassandra has transgressed the Greek laws which separate women from men, god from humans; laws which Apollo endorses and upholds. From Apollo's perspective, Kassandra's abilities (which he gave her on a sexual whim)

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[90] Pfeiffer, *Flying Leaves*, p.65.

[91] See Lisa Maurizio's article ''The Voice at the Centre of the World: Pythias' Ambiguity and Authority' in *Making Silence Speak: Women's Voices in Greek Literature and Society*, eds., Andre Lardinois & L. McClure (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp.38-54 (p.52).

[92] In *Trojan Women* Cassandra conceives Apollo not as her 'destroyer,' but as her guardian and her saviour. She even tells Hecuba that Apollo will aid in her revenge for the rape of Ilium: 'For if Loxias [Apollo] exists, Agamemnon, the famous lord of the Achaeans, will marry me in a union more disastrous then Helen's. Yes, for I shall kill him, and I shall lay waste to his house in revenge for my brothers and my father' (355-359). We already know that Cassandra does not kill Agamemnon. Nevertheless, Euripides adapts Aeschylus' famous character, not only emphasizing her 'virgin' body, which she devotes to her absent god, but also her strength and her capacity for retaliation.

may be seen as a blasphemous challenge to his divinity and a transgressive attempt to retain independent vision and 'truth.' Apollo only sees fit to relieve Kassandra's suffering when she, in desperation, looks to the heavens in the position of a suppliant. 'At the last,' Kassandra is forced to admit Apollo's masculine supremacy. And, once Apollo's fragile ego has been 'rightly' restored, he grants only 'death to free the slave.' Kassandra's crime is to have been a woman with the vision and expressivity of a (male) god, and not a meek suppliant.

Pfeiffer suggests that there may also be another insidious reason for Apollo's malice against his former lover. The narrator tells us that: 'but slave's employ/ Had from thy trembling lip effacèd quite/ The kisses of the god, and heaven's light/ Now shone upon thee only to destroy.' Does Apollo act out of jealousy, that Agamemnon has made Kassandra his sex-slave? If jealousy is the reason for Apollo's betrayal, then Apollo is not only guilty of sexual double-standards. His sexual jealousy—and not that of Klytemnestra—can be seen as the root cause of Kassandra's death. If we recall, Kassandra's murderer is never named. Pfeiffer simply refuses to hold Klytemnestra responsible for Kassandra's death. Rather, the blame can be seen to lie with Agamemnon and Apollo. In re-presenting Apollo as the faithless lover, Pfeiffer suggests that Kassandra has not only been misrepresented, but that her death has been misunderstood. For Pfeiffer, the murder of Kassandra is not a tale of female sexual jealousy, but a story of male exploitation and betrayal.

In 'Studies from the Antique', Klytemnestra, the actively feminist subject and Kassandra, the mis-understood seer can be seen to be mirror images. By refusing to hold Klytemnestra responsible for Kassandra's death, Pfeiffer asks us to re-think the relationship between these two infamous ancient characters. There is indeed a link, despite the lack of culpability. It is not Agamemnon that unites these women, but violence and language. If we consider Fagles comment that, 'there is a relationship between the murderess and the victim, as if Cassandra's vision might inspire the queen's revenge, the queen's revenge fulfill Cassandra's vision,' then the two women may be seen as inextricably linked, despite geographical and temporal distances.[93] In Kassandra's case, her garbled voice not only predicts her own death, but also seals the fate of Klytemnestra. Kassandra effectively brings to light Klytemnestra's terrifying powers. In

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[93] Fagles in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. p.38.

her groundbreaking *Sorties*, Hélène Cixous asks, 'can one kill with a tongue?'[94] Kassandra both does and does not kill with her tongue. After she has cried aloud her unintelligible prophecies, Kassandra sheathes her weapon. She dies in silence. Yet, in her own way, she is a violently transgressive woman.

'Power to wreak high ruin': Female Militancy and Pfeiffer's 'Klytemnestra'

The most (in)famous wife of European literature must surely be Clytemnestra. Clytemnestra not only commits the treacherous murder of her husband and his slave, but also adultery, with her husband's brother. Consequently, as Foley points out, 'she embodies the greatest threats to the cultural system of which a wife is capable; her crime, performed in revenge for a child, then divides her from her remaining children, and thus brings her maternal role into questions as well.'[95] Equalling Medea for her ferocity and capacity for vengeance, Clytemnestra is a truly disturbing character. Aeschylus's drama may be named for Agamemnon but, as Fagles notes, Clytemnestra is 'the far more potent force': 'not only does she have the right of retaliation on her side; she is one of the towering figures in European drama, diabolic yet strangely touching.'[96]

In her second 'Study from the Antique,' Emily Pfeiffer provides an empathetic assessment of Klytemnestra's murderous history. Pfeiffer not only re-examines the character of Klytemnestra, she also highlights the critical issue of how acts of cultural and political violence are evaluated in terms of gender. For instance, is it possible to view Klytemnestra as a militant hero, prepared to take action for her beliefs? Or should we view Klytemnestra as a malevolent deviant, who threatens the stability of (patriarchal) society? Considering the crimes of which she stands accused, it is perhaps difficult to see Klytemnestra as an exemplary female-hero. Yet, Pfeiffer effectively re-presents Klytemnestra's actions in light of her status as an abused daughter, wife and mother.

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[94] Hélène Cixous, p.108.
[95] Helene P. Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), p.201.
[96] Fagles in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, p.31. For a similar view of Clytemnestra's dominance see Winnington-Ingram's *Studies in Aeschylus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.76.

From this more sympathetic perspective, Klytemnestra represents women's ability to *fight back* against political oppression and male violence. Absolving Klytemnestra for the murder of Kassandra, Pfeiffer may appear to be morally ambivalent about the murderous actions of the Greek queen. However, Pfeiffer in fact resists the temptation to nullify or neutralize Klytemnestra's frightening symbolic potency. In Pfeiffer's poetic revision, Klytemnestra not only appropriates conventionally masculine prerogatives, she also retains her ancient capacity to 'wreak high ruin.'

In any depiction of Klytemnestra, the key issue concerns her *motivation* for killing Agamemnon and Cassandra. In the *Odyssey*, Agamemnon calls for a song that will curse the name of Clytemnestra for all time, for the role she played in his death. From Hades, Agamemnon accuses the queen of bathing 'in shame not only herself but the whole breed of womankind, even the honest ones to come, forever down the years' (2.490-92).[97] Following Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides all treat the figure of Clytemnestra and all three tragedians differ in their explanations of Clytemnestra's motives.[98]

The most famous depiction of Clytemnestra is undoubtedly that by Aeschylus who endows his queen with great rhetorical skills, as a means of justifying her actions. Raging over the bodies of her husband and Cassandra, Clytemnestra tells the assembled chorus of the *Agamemnon* that it is hypocritical for them to punish her for her transgressions, when Agamemnon murdered their daughter, Iphigenia, to no apparent consequence.[99] In so doing, Aeschylus emphasizes the sexual double-standards inherent in Greek justice and heroic action. Citing the laws of kinship and the blood thirstiness of the Furies, Clytemnestra insists that it was her duty to avenge the murder of her daughter. Her reason for killing Cassandra is, however, less convincing, as Clytemnestra appears to revel in the blood of her husband and his slave:

> He brutalized me. The darling of all
> the golden girls who spread the gates of Troy.

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[97] Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans., E.V Rieu, revised D.C.H. Rieu & P. Jones (London: Penguin, 1991).
[98] Clytemnestra appears in Aeschylus' plays, *Agamemnon, The Libation Bearers and The Eumenindes* (as a ghost). She re-appears in *Aegisthos and Orestes,* the *Electra* of both Euripides and Sophocles and Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis.* Her fate and her role in the murder of Agamemnon is also recorded by Apollodorus (E.6.23) and Pausanias (2.16.6).
[99] If we recall, Agamemnon's expedition to Troy is said to have begun at Aulis, where the king was instructed by the seer Calchas to sacrifice his daughter, in order to receive a blessing from the gods.

And here his spear-prize…what wonders she beheld!—
the seer of Apollo shared my husband's bed,
his faithful mate who knelt at the rowing-benches,
worked by every hand.
They have their rewards.
He as you know. And she, the swan of the gods
Who lived to sing her latest, dying song—
His lover lies beside him.
She brings a fresh voluptuous relish to my bed!
(*Agam.*1466-1475)

That Clytemnestra not only admits to, but relishes, the death of Cassandra can be seen to complicate her justification for the murders.

Clytemnestra's moral complexity is part of her great appeal, as Sally McEwan explains:

> Homer seems to assume that she acted by adulterous, free choice and thus he sees her as wholly villainous. After Homer, however, things get much more complicated. Since, as Aristotle observes, a proper hero needs mixed motives to be interesting, the issue for the authors we have from Aeschylus onward becomes some combination of problems of choice and compulsion; i.e., she is villain because she acts by informed choice, and/or she is a victim of injustice driven to react.[100]

Reading Clytemnestra as a victim or a villain can, however, be highly reductive and essentialist in terms of femininity. In other words, to view Clytemnestra as exceptional female villain (and therefore less of a woman) or to consider her as a betrayed wife (victimized and jealous) is to potentially deprive the character of any real sense of power and influence. Emily Pfeiffer resists the critical temptation to explain Clytemnestra (and Cassandra's) character in such simplistic, dichotomized terms. Rather, Pfeiffer re-examines Klytemnestra's actions in light of her socially assigned gender role.

Edith Hall observes that the legacy of Clytemnestra has been negative in that subsequent representations have tended to *react against* Aeschylus' matriarch, in favour of more 'effeminized' Clytemnestras. As a result, the 'motive of erotic interest in Aegisthus has assumed far greater significance than it possessed in the first play of

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[100] See Sally McEwan's introduction to *Views of Clytemnestra, Ancient and Modern* (see McEwan above), p.4.

Aeschylus' trilogy.'[101] Hall goes on to suggest that the character of Clytemnestra, as portrayed by Aeschylus, was so transgressive and challenging that, 'she was soon widely replaced by a less domineering character, of a type perhaps implied by the more sympathetic woman in Sophocles' *Electra* or Euripides' *Electra* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*.'[102] Indeed, in his *Electra*, produced almost forty years after Aeschylus's trilogy, Sophocles can be seen to undermine Clytemnestra's claims to be a concerned mother. Electra identifies entirely with her murdered father and exiled brother. In his *Electra* and *Iphigenia* Euripides, on the other hand, can be seen to humanize Clytemnestra, in that he presents the queen as a betrayed wife. However, Euripides's emphasis of the mother-daughter relationship also demonstrates the difficulties in identifying, or even associating Clytemnestra with other women.

As far as more modern adaptations are concerned, Hall points out that the 'authentic' Aeschylean Clytemnestra 'only began to speak in a voice once again immediate and relevant when she could address a late nineteenth-century audience.'[103] Clytemnestra, depicted as the 'manslaying Amazon, who prioritized the mother-daughter relationship over that between husband and wife,' re-emerges at 'exactly the chronological point at which women's rights as both political agents and as parents finally began to be discussed with gravity.'[104] Like Medea, therefore, Clytemnestra only becomes more like her 'original' self when women's participation in public, political and artistic life became increasingly prevalent.

Pfeiffer's depiction of Klytemnestra undeniably reflects the intense debates of the late nineteenth century and her own interests in women's rights. Yet, Clytemnestra can be a highly divisive figure, particularly in terms of feminism. On the one hand, as Kathleen Komar observes: 'Klytemnestra represents the feminist cause par excellence. Her story is really the story of the struggle of female, blood right against the founding of male, rational law and the establishment of patriarchy.'[105] If Clytemnestra represents the feminist cause in her battle with Agamemnon, she is a more problematic figure in relation to Cassandra. As Komar rightly points out, Clytemnestra is not just a threat to husbands

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[101] Edith Hall, 'Aeschylus' Clytemnestra versus her Senecan Tradition,' in *Agamemnon in Performance* (see Macintosh above), p.56.
[102] Hall, 'Aeschylus' Clytemnestra versus her Senecan Tradition,' p.57.
[103] Hall, 'Aeschylus' Clytemnestra versus her Senecan Tradition,' p.75.
[104] Hall, 'Aeschylus' Clytemnestra versus her Senecan Tradition,' p.74.
[105] Komar, *Reclaiming Klytemnestra,* p.26.

and sons: 'the *labrys*-wielding Klytemnestra is also a menace to other women, since her one undisputed murder is of the Trojan princess Kassandra.'[106] In other words, Clytemnestra not only represents women's rage against patriarchal oppression, she also represents women's anger against other women.

In the *Agamemnon* a terrified Cassandra describes Clytemnestra as a 'detestable hellhound' (1237), 'the monster of Greece' (1242) and 'the raging mother of death' (1245), before her fatal encounter with the queen. But in keeping with her approach in her first 'study from the antique,' Pfeiffer chooses to omit any reference to Kassandra in the second sonnet. Why does Pfeiffer omit the scene of violence which connects Klytemnestra and Kassandra? That Pfeiffer refuses to condemn Klytemnestra forces her audience to reconsider women's relationships to power and violence. Furthermore, Pfeiffer can be seen to remove one of the major motives for Klytemnestra's murder of Kassandra—that of sexual jealousy. I suggest that Pfeiffer re-writes the relationship between the two women in order to highlight their shared suffering. In re-presenting the characters as sympathetic female figures, Pfeiffer rejects the frequently cited motive of competitive femininity.

'Klytemnestra' certainly calls into question gender expectations, including notions of female solidarity, maternity and benevolence. Indeed, reading Pfeiffer's poem is a deeply gendered exercise, not least because much of Klytemnestra's power as a character lies in how we respond to her as a mother-figure. However, Pfeiffer is keen to remind her audience that Klytemnestra was not simply a mother and a wife. Before the rude appearance of Agamemnon, Klytemnestra was also someone's daughter:

I.

DAUGHTER of gods and men, great ruling will,
Seething in oily rage within the sphere
Which gods and men assign the woman here,
Till, stricken where the wound approved thee still
Mother and mortal, all the tide of ill
Rushed through the gap, and nothing more seemed dear
But power to wreak high ruin, nothing clear
But the long dream you waited to fulfil.

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[106] Komar, *Reclaiming Klytemnestra*, p.23.

Mother and spouse—queen of the king of men—
What fury brought Ægysthus to thy side—
That bearded semblant, man to outward ken,
But else mere mawworm, made to fret man's pride?
Woman, thy foot was on thy tyrant then—
Mother, thou wert avenged for love defied![107]

As a daughter, a wife and a mother, no one protects Klytemnestra's interests. The octet not only establishes Klytemnestra's history, but also outlines her motives for killing her husband (and Kassandra).

Clytemnestra and her sister Helen hold the somewhat dubious distinction of being cited as the cause of some of the most horrific acts of violence in European literary history. Yet, it should be remembered that this kindred pair are in fact victims of appalling acts of (male) violence. Before Clytemnestra was born, her mother Leda, the Queen of Sparta, was raped by Zeus in the guise of a swan. The 'eggs' from this forced union not only produced Helen and Clytemnestra, but also their twin siblings, Castor and Polydeuces (Pollux). Klytemnestra, 'DAUGHTER of gods and men' is, as Pfeiffer reminds us, the product of a rape. What is more, whilst Clytemnestra was a young maid, her sister Helen was abducted and raped by the Athenian King, Theseus. Helen was recovered by her twin brothers, only after the Dioscuri had launched a war, in Helen's name, against Athens and her people. Later, of course, Helen is abducted by the Trojan prince Paris. The resulting war, again launched in Helen's name, lasts for over ten years.

Euripides suggests that Clytemnestra was herself the victim of extreme sexual violence. In *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Clytemnestra accuses Agamemnon of murdering her husband Tantalus, of grabbing her baby from her breast and 'breaking its head on the ground.'[108] Agamemnon is also accused of taking Clytemnestra by force and of compelling her to marry him against her will. This pre-history may be a Euripidean invention. Nevertheless, Pfeiffer gestures toward the terrible sequence of violent events, which are integral to Klytemnestra's back-story. Moreover, Klytemnestra's history can be seen as a crucial factor in the crimes that she is seemingly destined to commit.

Klytemnestra's character may well have been moulded by her early experiences, but it is a more recent episode of brutality that preoccupies Pfeiffer's queen. As we know,

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[107] Pfeiffer, *Sonnets*, p.69.
[108] *Iphigenia in Aulis* features in *Euripides, Orestes and Other Plays*, translated and introduced by Philip Vellacott (London: Penguin, 1972).

Agamemnon sacrificed their daughter, Iphigenia, at the behest of the seer Calchas. Her daughter's death is the 'wound' from which Klytemnestra cannot heal. The gap left by Iphigenia's absence is filled with Klytemnestra's 'oily rage.' Yet another member of her kin has been brutally assaulted by a Greek hero. This time, however, Klytemnestra is determined to have her revenge. And, as a mother, Klytemnestra appears to have the right of retaliation: 'the wound approved thee still/ Mother.' According to the kinship system, Klytemnestra feels not only justified but obligated to seek revenge for the illegitimate death of her daughter.

In sacrificing his own daughter, Agamemnon acts, not as a father, but as the commander of the Greek fleet. At issue, therefore, are the competing claims of familial and civic obligations. Yet, this conflict is, as Fagles notes of the *Oresteia*, representative of much greater discord:

> Aeschylus insists that each generation create a new alliance between the forces in contention for its world; and he presents their conflicts in a range of ways, from cosmic to intensely personal. From a theological conflict between Will and Necessity, or Zeus and the Fates—the gods of the sky and the powers of the Earth; to a social, political conflict between the state with its patriarchal bias and the family with its matriarchal roots; to a psychological conflict between our intellect and our hunger for release, our darker, vengeful drives that can invigorate our dreams of ideality, equality and balance.[109]

For Aeschylus, then, civilization is the ultimate product of this conflict between opposing forces. Aeschylus's solution to such conflict, as represented in the conclusion to the *Oresteia* is, as Zeitlin suggests, to place 'Olympian over chthonic on the divine level, Greek over barbarian on the cultural level, and male above female on the social level.'[110] For Zeitlin, 'the male-female conflict subsumes the other two, for while it maintains its own emotive function in the dramatization of human concerns, it provides too the central metaphor which "sexualizes" the other issues and attracts them into its magnetic field.'[111] The clash between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra can be seen as the heart of the *Agamemnon* and the central focus of Emily Pfeiffer's 'Klytemnestra.'

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[109] Fagles, p.22.
[110] Froma I. Zeitlin, 'The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the Oresteia,' *Arethusa* 11:1 (1978), 149.
[111] Zeitlin, 'The Dynamics of Misogyny,' p.149.

Pfeiffer, it seems, if far less concerned with the cosmological forces battling for supremacy than she is with the socio-political conflict between the ruling Mother and Father of Argos. Indeed, Pfeiffer replicates much of the Aeschylean battle between Mother Right and Father Right, but she does so from the point of view of a wounded and abused Klytemnestra. The issue around which Pfeiffer focuses her argument is that of violence, enacted by the mother-figure. Klytemnestra's violent revenge is in itself a deeply gendered issue. Komar asks why it is that 'brutal male violence in war' is not only 'sanctioned but lauded in the classical texts, while female violence represents terrifying sacrilege?'[112] Pfeiffer's poem questions the basis of this distinction between male violence and female violence.

Nothing is 'more dear' to Klytemnestra than obtaining the 'power to wreak high ruin.' How she achieves and exercises that power is entirely dependent on her role as a wife and mother. Klytemnestra will lure her husband into a domestic trap. That is not to say that the deeds of the queen should be perceived as entirely private, domestic acts. As Zeitlin observes: 'husband is also king, an economy which conflates the two social statuses and erases political and domestic distinctions, and permits the merger of personal revenge and political ambition.'[113] In Klytemnestra's case, the personal certainly is political.

If the octet establishes the social situation and the psychology of Klytemnestra, then the sestet can be seen to clarify the queen's motive for revenge by rejecting the conventional assertion that Klytemnestra killed the king because of her passion for Agamemnon's brother, Aegisthus. Zeitlin explains that, 'in the *Agamemnon* the queen's primary motive was maternal vengeance for her child, Iphigenia; her second one was the sexual alliance she contracted with Aegisthus in her husband's absence.' Consequently, 'adulterous wife is now fully equated with the hostile mother. The faithless wife who betrayed her husband and has taken his usurper into her bed has now betrayed her other children to gratify her own sexuality.'[114] As a result, the queen's motivation can be seen to shift from obligations to kin, to irresponsible self-interest.

Perhaps responding to the growing trend for sensation fiction, Owen Meredith produced his own lustful Clytemnestra in 1855. Better known as Lord Edward Bulwer-

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[112] Komar, *Reclaiming Klytemnestra*, p.26.
[113] Zeitlin, 'The Dynamics of Misogyny,' p.153.
[114] Zeitlin, 'The Dynamics of Misogyny,' p.157.

Lytton, Meredith's drama formed part of a larger volume, entitled *Clytemnestra, The Earl's Return and Other Poems.* Clytemnestra dominates Lytton's drama of twenty scenes, replete with chorus. Despite her majesty, Lytton's Clytemnestra cuts a somewhat pathetic figure as her murderous intent is fuelled by her love for her weak and cowardly brother-in-law: 'But never did I feel this wretched heart/ Until it leap'd beneath Ægisthus' eyes.' Clytemnestra in fact attributes all her powers of vengeance to her hopeless love for her wretched swain: 'My life did but begin when I found thee/ O what a strength was hidden in this heart!' As a result, one feels that Lytton's Clytemnestra does not act out of righteous indignation or moral obligation, but out of a self-interested love for Aegisthus.

In contrast, Pfeiffer's narrator is incredulous about suggestions of Klytemnestra's passion for her husband's brother: 'what fury brought Ægysthus to thy side'? Intensely sceptical that any such affair between the queen and her brother-in-law has taken place, the narrator suggests that Klytemnestra's fervour for the 'mere mawworm,' is not based on sexual attraction. If there is one, the relationship with Ægysthus is secondary to her wider aims: 'nothing more seemed dear/ But power to wreak high ruin, nothing clear/ But the long dream you waited to fulfil.' Klytemnestra's violent actions cannot, therefore, be dismissed as irrational crimes of passion. Furthermore, Ægysthus cannot be credited with orchestrating the murders. Rather, Klytemnestra's relationship with Ægysthus is strategic; designed to inflict pain on Agamemnon.

Pfeiffer's Klytemnestra is not, despite the hesitancy of the narrator, psychologically weak or morally ambivalent. Nor does Klytemnestra struggle with her conscience or the validity of her feelings. There is nothing submissively feminine or pathetically corruptible about her. On the contrary, Klytemnestra's 'oily rage' becomes combustible in the second stanza. Indeed, Klytemnestra's actions explode the very sphere which is supposed to contain her:

II.

Woman and Greek—so doubly trained in art!—
Spreading the purple for the conqueror's tread,
Bowing with feline grace thy royal head—
How perfect whelp-robbed lioness thy part!
One wrong the more to wring the ancient smart,
Then three swift strokes, and the slow hope blooms red,
Who shamed the hero lays him with the dead,

Where nevermore his word may vex her heart.

Bold queen, what were to thee the gods of Greece?
What had been any god of any name,
More than the lion-heart you made to cease,
Or the live dog to all your humours tame?—
The very furies left your soul in peace
Until Orestes' sword drave home their claim.[115]

The intriguing opening line opens the sonnet to multiple readings. Is the tone of the narrator one of condemnation, or one of admiration? Is the Greek queen to be feared, for her violence and her treachery? Or is the 'bold queen' to be lauded for her stand against a tyrannical husband and an unjust social system? Pfeiffer's tone is deliberately ambivalent. The exclamation marks are matched in number by the question marks, indicating the moral complexity of Klytemnestra's actions. Whether Klytemnestra acts justly, or not, is determined by one's attitude to female violence and rage.

By penetrating the body of Agamemnon, Klytemnestra can be seen to, simultaneously, emasculate the king and assume his masculine powers. This conflict is not simply sexual, however. In devouring the lion-heart of her mate, Klytemnestra's actions represent the overthrow of all 'civilized' values and as such they are deeply threatening.[116] Despite the animalistic imagery, Klytemnestra is not dehumanized or entirely masculinized by her brutal actions. She is a woman still, albeit an exceptional woman. Klytemnestra kills the king not with mere brute force, but with terrific, intellectual skills.

In the second line, Pfeiffer alludes to the famous tapestry scene in Aeschylus's play, in which the queen persuades the king to incriminate himself. Laying rich tapestries before the feet of the conquering hero, Clytemnestra lures the king into the palace. The fabrics are the colour of royal blood, reminding us of Iphigenia's sacrifice and alerting us to the crime that is to come. The tapestries are not simply symbolic; the rich robes are also sacred to the Greek gods. One would be guilty of hubris and barbarity if one were to trample such sacred items beneath one's feet. In the *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra displays dazzling rhetorical skills to convince the arrogant king that he is worthy of such an

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[115] Pfeiffer, *Sonnets*, p.70.
[116] The reference to lions is a deliberate allusion to the gate of the royal palace at Mycenae, which features two lions battling on the pediment.

honour. As Fagles notes, 'the victor of the ten-year siege of Troy is defeated in a moment of psychological warfare with his wife.'[117]

Not to be seen in competition with Aeschylus, Pfeiffer astutely omits any dialogue. Nevertheless, Agamemnon, 'the king of men,' commits the same crime as his Aeschylean counterpart. Bowing to her audience, Klytemnestra plays her part expertly. But, as Pfeiffer indicates, her duplicitous skills are the result of her 'training' as a Greek wife and mother. Klytemnestra has been assigned to the domestic sphere, despite her 'great ruling will.' Her nature and her abilities far exceed her demeaning domestic role. There can, therefore, be little surprise that this talented, intelligent woman has turned her hand to devious schemes, when she has been unable to act freely in the public sphere.

The issue of female resourcefulness is again taken up by Pfeiffer in a later essay on the subject of women and work:

> The woman who wins the ear of the despot, is naturally one in whom love of power and joy in the exercise of cunning, have taken the place of the petty passions of her youth, and who feels an irresponsible pleasure in playing upon the lower chords of the man's nature, and leading him by flattery and cajolery, to advance or overthrow the puppets of the political game in accordance with the motives which rule in her narrow sphere. Far other is the influence, nurtured by freedom, by knowledge, and community of interest, that is now preparing.[118]

Pfeiffer appears to suggest that danger lurks behind the smiles of every helper-maiden. Indeed, Pfeiffer's comments can be seen to amount to, at best, a warning, or at worst, a threat. She suggests that the potential for female duplicity will remain for as long as women are confined to the 'narrow sphere' of the domestic realm. Only freedom, education and social interaction can prevent the overthrow of domestic despots.

Klytemnestra easily defeats the tyrannical Agamemnon, but not before she is forced to suffer one final insult. Indirectly, Pfeiffer alludes to the brooding presence of Kassandra, 'One wrong the more to wring the ancient smart.' If Klytemnestra needed any more reason to cut Agamemnon down to size, she has it in the figure of Kassandra. In a number of male-authored texts, including those of Ovid and Seneca, Clytemnestra's motivation is *not* related to the death of Iphigenia and the attendant obligations of kinship. Rather, Clytemnestra is portrayed as a sexually jealous spouse, who remains

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[117] Fagles, p.33.

faithful to Agamemnon until she beholds the captive Cassandra. As Hall points out, 'the sexually driven Clytemnestra who had emerged in antiquity, in reaction against Aeschylus' matriarchal androgyne, became the canonical Clytemnestra of the sixteenth to early nineteenth centuries, the early modern and neoclassical Clytemnestra.'[119] Reduced to sex-crazed adulterers, subsequent (Senecan-influenced) Clytemnestras are effectively dispossessed of their terrifying power and complexity.

Pfeiffer's queen has planned her revenge for ten long years. She always intended to kill Agamemnon, irrespective of Kassandra. Nevertheless, Kassandra's introduction into the royal palace is an offence to the king's legitimate wife. Moreover, her presence is a threat. Klytemnestra's standing (and her safety) is heavily dependent upon her status as Agamemnon's wife and the mother of the royal children. The 'queen of the king of men' is, ironically, extremely vulnerable in the event of Agamemnon's death (that is why she recruits Ægysthus to her cause). There is, however, no suggestion that in the course of killing Agamemnon that Klytemnestra actually kills Kassandra. The 'three swift strokes' of Klytemnestra's unnamed weapon seem only to be aimed at the king. In the absence of any definitive explanation, it may be that Klytemnestra takes pity on the Trojan maid, as Kassandra's suppliant position (potentially) mirrors her own. In any event, Pfeiffer avoids the difficult ethical (feminist) dilemma posed by Klytemnestra's violence toward another woman.

Pfeiffer's concern with the vulnerable position of married women is echoed in another essay from *Women and Work*. At once patriotic and dissenting, Pfeiffer declares: 'in the freest nation under the sun, the England of to-day, there is no security of freedom or justice for the married woman.'[120] In other words, women may physically reside in the state at the heart of the Empire, but they do so under the condition of slaves. Married women are afforded no protection by the state's most revered institution, the rule of law. The small concessions made in law have only taken place because women have demanded it, as Pfeiffer observes: 'it is women who have wrought out, and are still working at, their own deliverance. It would be impossible to maintain that the Married Women's Property Act, and other reforms, would have been carried in our time but for

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[118] Pfeiffer, *Women and Work*, pp.154-55.
[119] Hall, 'Aeschylus Clytemnestra versus her Senecan Tradition,' p.68-69.
[120] Pfeiffer, *Women and Work*, pp.20-21.

the Suffrage League.'[121] What is needed, Pfeiffer suggests, is for women to take political action into their own hands.

In another article for the *Contemporary Review* Pfeiffer refers to women's struggle for suffrage as 'the battle of her sex.'[122] This military metaphor is again repeated in *Women and Work*, where Pfeiffer describes the 'war of wills' between married 'partners.' Pfeiffer's description is worth quoting at length:

> The world has never yet been ruled by reason; and of all creatures, next to a child new-born, a reasonable woman may be regarded as the most unfended. Aspiring to be the friend of her husband; with love too pure for treachery where love survives; scorning to steal her way by the back-stairs of his vanity and weakness when it has departed; too proud in conscious worth, it must also be said to wait, a cringing courtier, in the ante-chamber of his moods; without hysterics as set-off against the violence of masculine temper, she has no armour but her truth, no sword but of the spirit...with public opinion half-hearted and the law an adversary, her position is full of trial, and even of danger. If these words appear startling and the picture overdrawn, it will only be to those who live in forgetfulness that a mother who has not broken her marriage pledge can still be deprived of her children (the most naturally inviolable of all human possessions) by other hand than that of death.[123]

The parallel of an 'unfended' Victorian wife with Klytemnestra's situation is striking. Except that Klytemnestra is no 'cringing courtier.' A queen with a weapon, she takes revenge for the deprivation and degradation of her daughter. And, if we were in any doubt about the significance of symbolic figures like Klytemnestra to the women's movement, Pfeiffer signals their import:

> The *Ewige Weibliche* [eternal feminine], though no new force in the world, will be lifted to its proper sphere. The woman, ceasing to be a mere queen-consort, as in the old ideal, will become a queen-regnant, bound to no taskwork, but acting in accordance with a rule from within—the true helper and complement of man, reigning no longer solely by his grace, but by the grace of God.[124]

Through 'Klytemnestra,' Pfeiffer can be seen to issue a challenge to current conceptions of conjugal and political arrangements.

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[121] Pfeiffer, *Women and Work*, p.173.
[122] Pfeiffer, 'The Suffrage for Women,' in *The Contemporary Review* (1885), p. 429.
[123] Pfeiffer, *Women and Work*, p.20.
[124] Pfeiffer, *Women and Work*, p.152.

As I suggested earlier, Klytemnestra's deeds are above all political, as her assault on the body of the king is an assault on the institutions of Greek 'civilization.' Yet, Klytemnestra does not act irreverently or without care. She does not fear the consequences of her actions either. Why should she? The laws of the Olympians, the laws of men, do not apply to Klytemnestra. Victimized and abused by such laws, Klytemnestra refuses to be controlled by them. But with the social and political odds stacked against her, it seems that the queen has little option but to use violence. Klytemnestra has been 'trained' in the art of violence by her early experiences and the Greek political system. Indeed, the queen, whose mother and sister were raped and whose daughter was slaughtered like an animal, can be seen to have internalized the values of her oppressors. But in acting out, Klytemnestra operates in complete contradistinction to her assigned social role. The mother, whose solemn duty it is to procreate and nurture, perverts all expectations by becoming the warrior whose only mission is vengeance and death.

In the late nineteenth century, campaigners for women's rights were frequently deemed as warriors or soldiers in the battle for equality. Indeed, Pfeiffer peppers her own polemical prose with keywords such as 'units,' 'battalions' and 'army.' Her use of military discourse is very much in evidence throughout *Women and Work*. Yet, in considering the capacities of her own sex, Pfeiffer considers that, 'the temper of the sex, as moulded by nature and circumstances, is not greatly militant.' Furthermore, women are, according to Pfeiffer, 'fundamentally opposed' to 'the profession of arms.' Women's work is to be 'creative, not destructive,' and their 'office in the spiritual to save, not to slay.'[125] At once appropriating and disavowing women's 'natural' aptitude to bear arms, Pfeiffer qualifies her own conflicted message:

> As a considerable amount of indolence and inertia is characteristic of human nature generally, we can hardly err in assuming that the vast majority of women would still preferred to be sheltered from, not to say lifted above, the rude battle of life, and to have their part in it taken by some man to whom the fight might prove an agreeable stimulant. But it may not be.[126]

Women may not be naturally inclined toward conflict, Pfeiffer insists, but necessity demands that women find it within themselves to join the battle. Like it or not, women

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[125] Pfeiffer, *Women and Work*, p.14.
[126] Pfeiffer, *Women and Work*, p.10.

are compelled to act on their own behalf. Adopting the tone of a general, Pfeiffer addresses her troops:

> Women in large numbers are called to the fight; they have been engaged in it more or less for many generations, and have been worsted in helpless thousands. They feel at last the necessity of equipping themselves for the conflict, and are arming. What more is to be said?[127]

As if to answer her own question, Pfeiffer continues:

> A fight; it is a word of dread. It is hard for faith itself to overcome all fear of what it may take away. The combative qualities are not amiable in themselves. May we hope that the strength of womanhood will adopt of them but what is needful to give firmness and decision to effort, and will temper the remainder and infuse it with its own essence?[128]

The question mark again speaks volumes. Pfeiffer knows that in the battle for social and political justice, some women may have to engage the enemy on their terms. Of those women engaged in such a fight, there will be casualties: 'many are doomed to perish, giving up the fight in utter weariness. We call them fallen. They are not fallen; they are thrown down in the struggle, cast into the mire, and ruthlessly trampled upon!' But the fallen heroes of the battle between the sexes are owed more than tears. Pfeiffer implores other women to unite behind their example and to applaud them, 'for opening our eyes to the criminal side of a system in which we have thoughtlessly acquiesced. To those who stand in a conflict so fierce, our strongest support is due.'[129] 'Klytemnestra' can be seen as Pfeiffer's own example of a woman determined to fight against her oppression, and win.

Pfeiffer's belligerent rhetoric may also be seen to reflect the growing movement toward militancy within first-wave feminism. Militant action had been stringently opposed by many female activists on the basis that it was antithetical to the democratic and libertarian values which underlay women's claims to equal rights. But, in 1903, with the establishment of the Women's Social and Political Union, female activists sought to follow a more militant agenda. Created by the Pankhurst family, the WSPU brought about a revival in the fortunes of the women's movement, as Barbara Caine suggests:

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[127] Pfeiffer, *Women and Work*, p.175.
[128] Pfeiffer, *Women and Work*, p.175.
[129] Pfeiffer, *Women and Work*, p.152.

The years between 1890 and 1918 saw the suffrage movement go from a period of torpor and exhaustion to one of extraordinary energy and acitivity. The militant campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union, which brought about this revival, met with angry opposition from street rowdies and from establishment institutions and individuals—but it also served to stimulate a range of new organizations, new strategies and new methods.[130]

Aside from the open-air rallies and high profile publicity stunts, the new forms of activism involved more calculated threats to public order. The militant tactics of scuffling with police, courting arrest and imprisonment, were followed by more serious acts of violence including arson and damage to property. Some women were committed to taking their protests even further, by directing their rage inward, rather than outward. The tactic of the hunger-strike, for instance, helped to raise the profile of the militants, but placed the lives of the protestors in jeopardy. Despite the dangers, as Martha Vicinus points out, militancy gave women the freedom to expresses themselves differently, to engage in a form of self-sacrificing politics, which had, potentially, the power to transform.[131]

Whilst Pfeiffer was a dedicated and passionate campaigner for women's political and economic rights, she was also very much a woman of her time in terms of class and race prejudice. The middle-class values of marriage, family and patriotism remained central to Pfeiffer's fight for equality. Therefore, I am not suggesting that Pfeiffer sought the violent overthrow of men on both domestic and political levels, or that she endorsed violent forms of protest. Rather, Pfeiffer hoped that the 'battle' for women's rights could be fought, primarily, on an intellectual and discursive level. In *Women and Work* Pfeiffer does not advocate the use of axes or swords against male opponents; the weapons she hopes women will employ are their intellects and their vocational skills. Consequently, a provocative poem like 'Klytemnestra' should be read as a highly suggestive examination of the nature and limits of female power and not a wholesale endorsement of militant feminism.

However, the emphasis of Pfeiffer's poem is directed toward Klytemnestra's victory over *Agamemnon*. Twenty-seven of the twenty-eight lines of the two sonnets

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[130] Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.158-159.
[131] See Martha Vicinus' important study, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (Chicago: 1985).

concern Klytemnestra's motivation and her act of murder. And, until Orestes returns to stake his claim, Klytemnestra is left in peace by the Furies to rule the kingdom of Argos. Pfeiffer could have left Klytemnestra not only 'in peace' but in power. Indeed, to have ended the poem with a murderous Klytemnestra in control of both the royal house and the *polis,* would have been intensely challenging to a contemporary audience.

In the nineteenth century, J.J. Bachofen's controversial thesis gave credence to the idea that women had been, before the instigation of patriarchal culture, leaders and rulers. However, other critics were outraged at the suggestion of female power. In an article entitled 'The Modern Revolt,' Eliza Lynn Linton revealed the extensive cultural anxieties about the increasing dominance of powerful women.[132] The worst offenders, in Linton's eyes, are 'the largest minded women who swagger about, bad copies of a bad style of man, talking of everything they should not, reviling maternity, deriding woman's work, scorning the sweet instinctive reliance of the weaker, and affecting to despise the sex they ape.'[133] Young women are simply 'clamorous to take the offices of men, enter into competition with them on their own ground. And if they succeed,' Linton warns, 'one result must inevitably arise—the further drainage from the country of men, beaten out of the field by women.'[134] Linton's anxious anti-feminism failed to take into account the position of the head of state. Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India in 1876, demonstrating that mothers could not only be queens, but the rulers of Empires. In 'Klytemnestra,' Pfeiffer stops just short of such a revolutionary conclusion.

Edith Hall suggests that in ancient times it was 'ideologically virtually *impossible* to perform Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (or any imitation with a similarly androgynous, autonomous, proactive, amoral, and politically triumphant queen) in isolation.' The *Libation Bearers* and *Eumenides* 'are actually *required* if Clytemnestra is to be punished for her insurrection, and formally subordinated.'[135] Pfeiffer gestures toward Klytemnestra's punishment, by looking beyond the *Agamemnon* to both to the *Libation Bearers* and the *Eumenides*. Once again, however, Pfeiffer's closing lines are thoroughly equivocal.

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[132] Eliza Lynn Linton, 'The Modern Revolt of Women' in *Macmillan's* 23 (December, 1870): 142-149.
[133] Linton, 'The Modern Revolt,' p.149.
[134] Linton, 'The Modern Revolt,' p.148.
[135] Hall, 'Aeschylus' Clytemnestra versus her Senecan Tradition,' p.60. Italics in original.

In the *Libation Bearers*, Orestes tells us that he has been sent by Apollo to kill his mother. Apollo is said to have told Orestes to 'gore' Klytemnestra and her lover 'like a bull.' The rules of kinship oblige Orestes to fulfil the god's command. But in avenging his father by killing his mother, Orestes allies himself solely with paternal powers and interests. His murder of Clytemnestra can therefore be seen as repudiation of the mother-figure. Moreover, Orestes can be seen to act on his own behalf as much as he acts out of duty toward his father. By destroying the threat posed by the queen, Orestes claims the authority of the King. It is this 'claim' to patriarchal power that Pfeiffer refers to in the final line of the sonnets.

Orestes' claim to patriarchal authority is immediately countermanded in the *Libation Bearers* by the sudden appearance of the Erinyes. As Zeitlin explains, Orestes' supposed conquest of his mother is not as clear cut as it seems to be:

> Orestes' victory over Clytemnestra does not, however, as in the more typical myth of matriarchy, result in the defeat of the female and in the curtailment of her power. Far from it. The murder of the mother evokes a renewed and redoubled power, exemplified now in a proliferation of negative female imagoes of supernatural origin.[136]

The negative female imagoes of the *Oresteia* are the Erinyes. Also known as the Furies, these primitive deities provoke what Zeitlin calls, 'the deepest fantasies of buried masculine terrors.' Manifesting as children, the aged Erinyes are infertile. Labelled the 'Daughters of Night,' the Erinyes inhabit the depths of the earth. Dripping poisonous fluid from every orifice, the avenging Furies are repellent to both gods and men. Representing archaic female power, as well as profoundly negative femininity, the Erinyes have a vitally important role to play in the conclusion to the *Oresteia*.

The primary issue of Aeschylus' trilogy is, as many commentators have pointed out, that of justice.[137] In the *Eumenides*, as Zeitlin observes, 'the crime of Clytemnestra (mariticide) is measured against Orestes' (matricide) and found to be more opprobrious.' Furthermore, the Erinyes, representing not only Clytemnestra but the female side, are also judged. They are seen to 'champion a justice which is judged blind, archaic, barbaric, and regressive, a justice which is to be superseded by the new institution of the

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[136] Zeitlin, 'The Dynamics of Misogyny,' p.158.
[137] See, for example, Zeitlin, 'The Dynamics of Misogyny,' and Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*.

law court in which they will in future play a supporting not a starring role.'[138] The arbiter of this new justice is none other than the virgin warrior-goddess, Athena. Only Athena, who is neither fully male nor female, has the capacity to end the cycle of tragic revenge and to impose (patriarchal) order.

Athena's solution to the conflict between the state with its patriarchal bias and the family with its matriarchal roots is to transfer female power and agency from the political realm, to the sphere of religion, exemplified by the new role assigned to the Erinyes. However, Athena's transference of power may also be seen as a brilliant diversionary tactic, as Zeitlin points out:

> The androgynous woman in power does not disappear but is reasserted and reaffirmed in her divine counterpart. The displacement of the issue upwards in this last play avoids the specifically human dilemma of the female in her dual role of mother (power) and wife (deference). It also effectively removes the psychological issue from the human dilemma of a son who has killed his own mother by defining it as a social and cosmic problem and quite literally putting in the laps of the gods.[139]

In other words, the battle of sexes is not definitively concluded at the end of the *Eumenides*.

Similarly, there is no simple conclusion to Pfeiffer's 'Klytemnestra.' One may conclude that violence only begets violence. That power seized through violent action cannot and will not last because in itself it reflects tyranny and subjugation. Thus, Klytemnestra cannot escape the claims of the past. Or, one may consider that in drawing his phallic sword against his mother, Orestes' seizes power not by right, but by might. Forced to suffer the violence of another male relative, Pfeiffer makes it very difficult for us to ignore or overlook Klytemnestra's painful history. As a daughter, a wife and a mother, Klytemnestra has never enjoyed any protection from male violence. The laws of the 'civilized' Greeks fail her. So too do the gods. Nevertheless, the self-sacrificing actions of Klytemnestra stand as a reminder that despite the social and political injustices of the public world, women always retain the transgressive power to wreak high ruin.

In 'Studies from the Antique' Pfeiffer creates a dramatic dialogue between two powerful female figures. The conflict which is supposed to take place between these two

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[138] Zeitlin, 'The Dynamics of Misogyny,' p.162.

supposedly disparate characters never materializes. In its place, Pfeiffer suggests that these female figures have grounds to unite rather than to fight. After all, Klytemnestra and Kassandra are both royal figures forced to endure pain and abuse, before becoming the victims of war—the Trojan War and the seemingly endless battle between the sexes. The twin-sonnet format allows Pfeiffer to create a sympathetic exchange of ideas, and provides an alternate point of convergence for Klytemnestra and Kassandra. Pfeiffer not only creates a dialogue between her characters, but also between ancient models and the everyday reality of women's lives in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, Pfeiffer can be seen to employ these symbolically loaded characters in order to galvanize the women's movement. Originating out of Pfeiffer's study of antique literature, 'Kassandra' and 'Klytemnestra' could not have been more timely, nor more representative of Victorian women's struggles for social and political freedom.

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[139] Zeitlin, 'The Dynamics of Misogyny,' pp.173-74.

'A world without woman in any true sense': Feminism and Hellenism in *Flying Leaves from East and West*

In 1880 Emily Pfeiffer wrote a poem entitled 'Hellas.'[1] Like Byron and Shelley before her, Pfeiffer envisages a 'new' England in the poem, inspired by the glorious achievements of the ancient Greeks. However, in her travelogue *Flying Leaves from East and West* (1885), published only five years later, Pfeiffer reveals her deep ambivalence about the androcentric ancient culture which she had previously so revered. The narrative of *Flying Leaves* is discontinuous, divided between Pfeiffer's trip to Asia Minor and Greece, and her travels 'West,' in North America. This arrangement, of a divided East and West with a stable Britain at the centre not only suggests Pfeiffer's imperialist sympathies, but also her interest in 'democratic' processes. In *Flying Leaves* Pfeiffer can be seen to exploit the potential of the travel genre as a form for social and political commentary. In the harems of Asia Minor and in Athens, Pfeiffer is able to find uncomfortable parallels with the disenfranchised women of Victoria's Empire. However, Pfeiffer's conflicting responses to her experiences in Turkey highlights Victorian configurations of the Orient and the complex role of women in racist and imperialist discourses of the period. Indeed, *Flying Leaves* suggests how contemporary debates concerning class, racism, feminism and imperialism shape the observations of female explorers. A complex document, *Flying Leaves* can be seen as a radical political pamphlet, a treatise on aesthetic and ethical values and a re-evaluation of Hellenism and the influence of Greek culture on British society.

Two years before she left for Greece, Pfeiffer wrote 'Hellas.' As the title suggests, the poem is an attempt to re-ignite the flame of Romantic Hellenism for a late Victorian audience. Sub-titled, 'An Invocation,' the lyric can be seen as a tribute to Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley and the Greece of their Romantic imaginings. The title is, of

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[1] The poem is included in the volume *Under the Aspens* (London: Kegan Paul, 1882).

course, a direct allusion to Shelley's verse-drama, 'Hellas: A Lyrical Drama' (1822) and like Shelley's poem, Pfeiffer's 'Hellas' is an entirely textual construction.[2]

Shelley, who rather indiscriminately declared that 'we are all Greeks,' was the first in a long line of writers who throughout the nineteenth century confidently asserted the similarities between the English and the ancient Greeks. As we have seen, Matthew Arnold famously compared Periclean Athens to Victoria's Empire, whilst John Stuart Mill felt that the battle of Marathon was a more important event in English history than the battle of Hastings. Later, as a young woman travelling in Greece, Virginia Woolf observed that, 'Germans are tourists and Frenchmen are tourists but Englishmen are Greeks.'[3] In 'Hellas,' Pfeiffer also depicts the English as the natural inheritors of Greek culture and values. Such ideological appropriations suggests how, as Siegel points out, 'colonization may occur at the level of narrative and imagination as well.'[4]

Writing over fifty years after Greek Independence, Pfeiffer is not directly concerned with the struggles of modern Greece. Pfeiffer in fact transforms Byron's revolutionary topos into an ideological location in which she can articulate her feminism. In Pfeiffer's re-vision, Greece is embodied in the figure of Athena. In re-appropriating Athena, Pfeiffer effectively re-conceives the social and aesthetic values of the ancient Greeks in terms of femininity. In fact Pfeiffer can be seen to restore femininity as a vital principle in the perception of 'Hellas':

> HAIL, Goddess of the heaven-reflecting eyes,
> Divine Athena! Thou whose sweet breath blew
> The message of the Gods the wide world through
> And showed us sovereign reason in the guise
> Of all-unearthly beauty; wake, arise
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> With fresh revealings; where the plant first grew
> The fallen seed its life may still renew,
> And yield young off-shoots, strange to denser skies.

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[2] For a thorough discussion of Shelley's 'Hellas' and his (phil)hellenism see Jennifer Wallace's *Shelley and Greece* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1997).
[3] Virginia Woolf, 'A Dialogue upon Mount Pentelicus,' in *The Times Literary Supplement*, ed. S.P. Rosenbaum, 11-17 September (1906), p.979.
[4] See Kristi Siegel's Introduction to *Issues in Travel Writing: Empire, Spectacle and Displacement* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), p.3.

Pfeiffer's revisionism can not only be seen to underline the cultural authority of Hellenism, but also to highlight the absence of women from social, political and historical processes. In other words, Pfeiffer's fantasy of a feminized Hellas is exactly that, a fantasy. By transforming Greece into an ideological topos, Pfeiffer effectively ignores the ideological problems posed by Greek culture.

Pfeiffer had clearly read Ruskin's essay *Queen of the Air* (1869), in which Ruskin re-defined Athena as the creative principle or 'formative power' of nature.[5] It is also highly likely that Pfeiffer had read Augusta Webster's poem 'Athens' from the volume *Blanche Lisle, and other Poems*. Published in 1860, Webster's poem tracks the influence of Hellenic values over British culture:

> Ah! though the years have veiled thine ancient creed,
> Has the Maid Mother's gentle smile indeed
> Less soul-inspiring power,
> Than her stern beauty with the azure eyes,
> That seemed to thee to gaze from thy pure skies
> In thy strong hour?

Webster considers the power of Athens to be on the wane. Unlike Pfeiffer who appeals for 'fresh revealings,' Webster's Athena is merely a shadow of her former self:

> Once so strong beautiful: and thou,
> Erst the wise learner of undying truth,
> The ancient teacher of the yet young earth,
> Pale Athens, to thine age we bow
> With saddened reverence for thy fallen worth,
> Yea, mourn thy faded might with venerating ruth.

Whereas Pfeiffer finds Athenian culture rich and inspiring, the twenty-three year old Webster finds Athens to be irrevocably antiquated and almost soporific. The difference is interesting, particularly because the classically educated Webster also found Greek literature and mythology to be valuable imaginative resources.

Pfeiffer's interest in Greek culture did not remain purely imaginative. Unlike Shelley, who declined to visit Greece on the basis that, "I had rather not have any more of

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[5] That Pfeiffer had not only read Ruskin's essay, but also Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* can be seen from this quote from *Flying Leaves*: 'As in the breath of Athena, the lofty Queen of the Air, the sweetness and

my hopes and illusions mocked by sad realities," Pfeiffer was prepared to have her idealized vision of Hellas challenged by reality.[6] But what would Emily Pfeiffer find in the ruins of Athens? Would she find the traces of Athena's divine influence? Or would Athena prove to be absent; the empty cipher of a 'dead' language? In the winter of 1882, Emily and her husband J. Edward Pfeiffer set sail for the East.

Despite claims to the contrary, Pfeiffer was merely one in the long list of nineteenth-century female explorers/tourists determined to set foot in Greece. In *Traveller's to an Antique Land*, for instance, Eisner suggests that 'women travellers have unfortunately not written as frequently about Greece as they have about more exotic and dangerous locales.'[7] A quick look at the long list of nineteenth-century female travellers to Greece would seem suggest otherwise. Women such as Isabel Armstrong, Fanny Blunt, Mary Dawson-Damer, Lady Francis Egerton, Elizabeth Grosvenor, Catherine Janeway, Agnes Lewis Smith, Mabel Moore, Felicia Skene, Lady Hester Stanhope and Jane Ellen Harrison, all traveled to and wrote about Greece.[8] Their interests and reasons for travel were as diverse as their social and educational backgrounds.

The travelogues of many Victorian women are frequently described in terms of escapism, from the oppressive regimen of middle-class domesticity. In many ways Emily Pfeiffer was at liberty from the demands of a conventional middle-class lifestyle. The Pfeiffers had no children and their considerable wealth afforded them a high level of comfort and independence. Aside from her household duties, Emily was therefore able to dedicate much of her time to her own interests and intellectual advancement. Furthermore, wealth enabled travel. Having already made numerous trips to Europe and around the British Isles, on this occasion the Pfeiffers elected to travel further abroad.

The first section of *Flying Leaves from East and West* is an account of the Pfeiffers visit to Asia Minor. Significantly, Pfeiffer chooses not to disclose her reasons for travel. The impetus for Pfeiffer's journey may have been deeply personal as Emily's younger sister, Caroline Rocca and her family, lived near the port of Smyrna in Asia

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light that was in it was something in excess of the warmth' (p.59). For an excellent reading of Ruskin's use of mythology see Dinah Birch's *Ruskin's Myths* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

[6] Quote from Percy Byshee Shelley as quoted by Trelawny in *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron*, 2nd ed., (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1859), p. 86.

[7] Robert Eisner, *Travellers to an Antique Land* (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1991), p.2.

[8] As Mary Beard points out, Jane Harrison's *Introductory Studies to Greek Art*, which was based on Pausanias' account of the monuments of Attica, 'became the standard handbook for an archaeological visit

Minor. How or why Caroline Rocca came to be living near Smyrna is unclear. What is clear is that Pfeiffer obfuscates her reasons for travel. In fact Pfeiffer tries to obscure the identities of her travel companions, referring to them as a capital letter; 'E—' for her husband Edward and 'C—' for her sister Caroline. Furthermore, there are no pictures, photographs or sketches in *Flying Leaves*. Pfeiffer's evasive narratorial strategies suggest her acute awareness of discursive constraints concerning women's travel writing.[9] The effect of this deliberate obfuscation is that Pfeiffer's concerns and opinions become central and we are more likely to view her, despite the plural pronoun, as an independent, intrepid traveller. As Pfeiffer knew, the narratorial distance enabled by such strategies allows for more direct political commentary.

For travellers in the nineteenth century, as Robert Peckham observes, a voyage to Greece was mediated through a canon of ancient texts which shaped whatever was written about the country.[10] A journey to Greece was also influenced by the wealth of contemporary textual and visual representations. Alongside poetic and dramatic constructions, the guidebooks of the period demonstrate the extent to which travel was inseparable from textual, interpretive processes. For instance, the fifth edition of Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in Greece* suggests that the country is an ancient manuscript, laid open for the educated, middle-class British tourist to read and interpret: 'the aspect of Greece is that of the old manuscript; covered as it may be by many a palimpsest but it is only in proportion as the original is read that the value is felt.'[11] Of course, for female travellers it was (and is) vital to try to interpret the absences and silences regarding women in the Grecian 'manuscript.' In order to qualify her own classical and interpretive credentials Pfeiffer lets it be known that she has read Homer, Plato and the ancient Greek dramatists, as well as the ancient travel writer, Pausanias. However, as Pfeiffer did not know Greek, her knowledge of the ancient authors is mediated through the process of translation. Pfeiffer's journey to Hellas may therefore be seen as an exploration of a Greece that is both known and unknown.

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to Athens (the "Blue Jane").' See Beard's *The Invention of Jane Harrison* (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.6.

[9] For a more detailed discussion of discourse theory see Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock, 1972) and, in relation to women's travel writing, Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1997).

[10] See Robert Shannan Peckham's article, 'Exoticism of the Familiar' in *Writes of Passage*, ed. James Duncan & Derek Gregory (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 164-184 (p.172).

[11] Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in Greece*, 5th Edition (London: John Murray, 1884), p.9.

Greece in the late nineteenth century was not the classical Hellas of antiquity, despite claims to the contrary. William Makepeace Thackeray, following his travels in Greece, described the country as 'the most classical country in the world.'[12] Murray's *Handbook* suggested that Greece has 'no modern history of such a character as to obscure the vividness of her classical features.'[13] This kind of imperial nostalgia briefly colours Pfeiffer's narrative. Smyrna may well have been the birthplace of Homer (and the *Iliad*) in the second half of the 8th century, B.C. Like a topographical guide, Pfeiffer notes that she can track the course of 'Homer's river.'[14] The Homeric heroes are, however, long since absent. Forced to abandon her sense of nostalgia, Pfeiffer observes that the inhabitants of Smyrna are not the familiar characters of Hellenic legend, but modern 'Greeks, Turks, Arabs, Albanians, negroes and Jews' (4).[15] The port has a decidedly 'Eastern' character and its population is, to the visiting Pfeiffer, exotic and alien.

Flying Leaves is dominated by a procession of 'exotic' female characters. Adopting a conventionally masculinist, colonial perspective, Pfeiffer is particularly drawn to the veiled women that she meets in the Smyrnian bazaars. She finds the wealthy Turkish women, adorned by soft folds of 'feminine' muslin, strangely alluring. Yet, her reaction to 'a little party of Turkish dames possibly of a lower rank' is extreme, revealing her deep sense of anxiety:

> They are also muffled in the feringhees, and have on their faces the regulation yashmak, but not of white muslin. It is a veil thrown over the head, and worn under the head-dress, of which veil the ground colour is a beet-root red, variegated with a pattern in black and white. A hideous suggestion of tattooing is the result of this face gear, doubly hideous by reason of the sanguinary hue imparted to the countenance, and the lines of the pattern traversing those of the features. The women thus disguised have all the appearance of monsters (15).

Issues of class, consumerism, racism and feminism coalesce in this remarkable description. The more opaque veil poses a clear problem for Pfeiffer. On one level, the veil is a marker of racial difference and cultural oppression, which undermines the women's femininity and sense of identity. On another level, because the veil halts the

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[12] William Makepeace Thackeray, *Notes on a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo* (Heathfield: Cockbird Press, 1844), p.52.
[13] Murray's *Handbook*, p.2.
[14] Pfeiffer is probably referring to the river Meles.

penetrating gaze of the 'colonial' subject, the lack of transparency is not only interpreted as a manifestation of the women's mysterious qualities, but also of Turkish tyranny. As Grewal suggests, 'the veil and the harem were fascinating to European culture because they stood for the opacity that they believed marked what was radically different from Western culture. To remove these was to civilize.'[16] The Turkish dames, 'of a lower rank,' are re-presented by Pfeiffer as unassailably Other.

Pfeiffer's extreme response contrasts sharply with the reaction of other female travellers to the veil. Over a century earlier, for instance, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu suggested that the 'ferigée' provided Turkish women not only with freedom from masculine eyes, but also the 'entire Liberty of following their Inclinations without danger of Discovery.'[17] Montagu describes the veil as physically and sexually liberating, a 'perpetual masquerade.' On a number of occasions during her residence in Turkey she describes donning the 'asmak' which, she says, has 'become not only very easy but agreeable to me.'[18] Pfeiffer's imperial myopia causes her to disregard the perspective of the veiled woman. Unlike Montagu, she is unable and/or unwilling to appreciate the liberatory potential of being the looker, rather than the looked upon.[19]

The Turkish 'dames' briefly engage Pfeiffer and her sister in conversation, which 'C—' translates. In this 'foreign' land, Pfeiffer is unable to represent herself, so she must be represented. Significantly, the women speak to Pfeiffer and her sister in Greek. If the veil was, to Pfeiffer, a marker of incivility (if not dehumanization), Greek language is an indicator of high culture and learning. Pfeiffer is spoken to in a language that she does not understand (but wishes she knew), yet she manages to retain her sense of imperiousness. She describes the encounter as 'a pleasant little incident, one calculated to whet the appetite for further communication with these poor custom-bound sisters, survivals of a not yet foregone tyranny' (16). As representatives of both the British and Ottoman empires, it is ironic that it is only through Greek that the women are able to forge a connection.

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[15] All quotations are taken from Pfeiffer's *Flying Leaves from East and West* (London: Field & Tuer, 1885). The page numbers will be shown in parentheses in the text.
[16] See Inderpal Grewal's important study, *Home and Harem*, p.50.
[17] Mary Wortley Montagu, *Complete Letters*, ed. Robert Halsband, 3 vols., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-67), 1: 328.
[18] Montagu, 1:397.
[19] I borrow this phrase from Mary Louise Pratt. See Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992).

Pfeiffer's next opportunity for imperial gazing takes place in the harem of the ex-governor of Smyrna, Midhat Pasha. For a number of Victorian women travellers to the East, a visit to a harem was obligatory. As Foster and Mills point out, 'this cultural arena had become a trope for the Orient itself, an analogy for the desired unknown.' Yet for female travellers, the harem was far from unfamiliar: 'a visit to a harem had become a regular part of the female tourist itinerary by the late 1840s and constituted a flourishing commercial venture by the 1870s, as is attested by Annie Jane Harvey's guide of 1871.'[20] A printed guide suggests that the harem was a space that could be definitively read and understood, according to a set of standardized assumptions. The harem was, however, a particularly complex cultural construction in which the discourses of imperialism, feminism, sexuality and racism converged and competed.

In *Home and Harem* Inderpal Grewal suggests that discourses concerning Empire, race and nation often prove to be sites of enunciation for feminist subjects. For female travellers, the harem could be seen as a specific site of enunciation for their feminist views. Grewal suggests that, 'for the European male, the harem symbolized mystery and allure as well as female subservience and unfreedom, for the Englishwomen the harem became an example of the consequence of the denial of freedom to women as well as the problem of inferior races.'[21] The harem could also stimulate thinking about the onlooker's own culture, as the harem and the bourgeois home could be seen as mutually constitutive. In *Flying Leaves* Pfeiffer's account of her visit to Midhat Pasha's harem demonstrates that passionate beliefs in both British racial superiority and feminism are not mutually exclusive subject positions.

Perhaps the biggest marker of difference between British women and their Turkish counterparts was the issue of travel. In many nineteenth century accounts, travel is conceived as a reflection of modernity and social advancement.[22] The women of Midhat's harem do not travel, in contrast to the upwardly mobile Pfeiffer. That the women rarely cross the threshold of the harem is seen by Pfeiffer as a form of cultural and ethnic retardation. Indeed, Pfeiffer seems to be bound to the convention that travel is progressively transformative:

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[20] See Shirley Foster & Sara Mills, *An Anthology of Women's Travel Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p.15.
[21] Grewal, *Home and Harem*, p.82.

> I saw plainly that nothing could have got her to admit the revolutionary notion that women could go abroad, or dwell at home, otherwise than under the guard and tutelage of eunuchs. To have smuggled such an idea into her head, it would have been necessary to trepan her. As that was not to be thought of, I sat digesting my disappointment in silence (25).

To 'trepan' can mean to entice and entrap; it can also refer to a surgical procedure in which an instrument is used to remove circular sections of the skull. Either way, Madam Midhat is highly resistant to Pfeiffer's attempt to smuggle her feminist agenda into the harem and into her head. Pfeiffer assumes that the women of the harem share her ambitions and aspirations. Moreover, Pfeiffer falsely positions herself as a fully enfranchised colonial subject, in opposition to her incarcerated Turkish 'sisters.' At one stage Madame Midhat in fact mistakes Pfeiffer and her companions as envoys from the British government. Pfeiffer 'assured her we were unattached and insignificant persons only travelling for our pleasure, and having no influence or special knowledge of our Government or its counsels' (23). Pfeiffer's political insignificance does not, however, inhibit her sense of (racial) superiority. As Chandra Mohanty wryly observes, 'beyond sisterhood there are still racism, colonialism, and imperialism.'[23]

After further conversation with Madame Midhat, a frustrated Pfeiffer declares: 'the whole tale of the wicked and impotent old East rose before us in this picture, and at the moment we would gladly have set fire to that Turkish quarter, and have freed those poor captives stagnating within it' (27). The violence of this statement is extraordinary. At home, Pfeiffer was not a militant feminist engaged in violent actions. Yet, in this Oriental context, Pfeiffer is able to position herself as a freedom-fighter, battling against the oppression of the 'wicked' Turks. Consequently, we can see Pfeiffer strategically, if not cynically, deploy the racist and imperialist prejudices surrounding the harem as a means to further her own political agenda at home.

Unable to identify with the seemingly inert Turkish women, Pfeiffer adopts a tone of moral superiority: 'It is their perverted womankind, grown feeble and corrupt in the close atmosphere of the harem, who are dragging and holding them down' (19). The

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[22] For a more detailed analysis of travel and modernity see Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, [1996] 2000).
[23] Chandra Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practising Solidarity* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), p.36.

close, intimate environment of the harem was frequently associated with hyper-sexuality, polygamy and lesbianism.[24] Pfeiffer characterizes the harem as 'a zone of evil' in order to emphasize Christian values such as marriage, abstinence and work, to reveal them as British characteristics.[25] Furthermore, the unemployed women of the harem are seen as a direct impediment to the social and cultural development of the Turks. Pfeiffer is unable to perceive the value of an entirely female space and she completely overlooks the subversive potential of the harem as a counterpoint to British conceptions of 'family' and the 'household.'

By depicting the Turkish women as 'perverted' and the British as morally superior, Pfeiffer loses the provocative analogy between the middle-class Victorian home and the harem. In comparison with the abject state of the Turkish women, British women were liable to read Pfeiffer's account and feel relatively liberated. Consequently, Pfeiffer reaches out to Madame Midhat and the women of the harem, in order to re-establish the case for female solidarity against patriarchal oppression: 'we inquired if the Turkish ladies generally, and Madame Midhat in particular, did not desire and hope for some change in the condition of their lives. We were assured in answer that they did, but that there were many difficulties in the way' (24). Rather than divided by racial and cultural differences, the women are perceived to be united by their struggles for social and political freedom. Of course, Pfeiffer's feminist project cannot be easily divested from her imperial subjectivity. Her attempt to export a trans-national feminist agenda must be seen in the same context as Britain's political ambitions in Eastern Europe.

Throughout the nineteenth century, as Peckham observes, Greece was conceived as a borderland, as 'both as the source of Hellenism and as a vital geopolitical space in the establishment of a European bulwark against the encroaching East.'[26] Furthermore, as Bastéa suggests, 'many Greek politicians and intellectuals in the nineteenth century believed that the political mission of Greece was to act as a conduit, receiving the light of Western civilization and transmitting it to the East.'[27] If Greece was the geographical bulwark, then Hellenism was the ideological battleground. In England, however,

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[24] See Malek Alloula's description of the harem in *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
[25] I borrow the phrase 'zone of evil' from Grewal, *Home and Harem*, p.51.
[26] See Peckham's article, p.167.
[27] Eleni Bastéa, 'Nineteenth-Century Travellers in Greek Lands: Politics, Prejudice and Poetry in Arcadia,' *Dialogos* 4 (1997), 47-69 (54).

Hellenism was a highly contested heterogeneous discourse. For women and ethnic minorities, Greek values fostered socio-political exclusion, not 'democracy.' It is therefore in Athens, at the seat of 'democracy' and not the harem, where Pfeiffer's identity as a feminist subject is most fully realized.

'Your coming seems rather a return': Emily Pfeiffer in Athens

Noting the exact date of her arrival in Athens, Pfeiffer recalls the overwhelming impression of the Athenian vista: 'none...are likely to forget their first landing on Grecian shores, the first deep inspiration of the bright air of Attica, or above all, the first vision of the Acropolis as it swims into sight above the olive groves which bound the carriage from the port of Peræus' (39). Yet, at the time of Pfeiffer's visit, Athens was no Romantic idyll. Gone were the sublime lines (if they ever truly existed) of Stuart and Revett and the picturesque pre-Revolutionary landscapes of the Romantic painters. In their place, were new buildings and civic works.[28] *Flying Leaves* makes no reference to the contemporary buildings and Greece's drive toward modernization. Pfeiffer was not, however, the only visitor to omit such significant details. Bastéa points out that many travellers were reluctant to describe the state of flux and instability that characterized the 'new' nation. 'As modern Greece struggled to define its role in modern Europe, shedding first its picturesque Ottoman and then its rugged revolutionary image, it lost that special place it had held in the hearts of many European travellers and politicians.'[29] British travellers wanted to find Athens to be both a thriving, 'modern' European city and a shrine to Greece's ancient past. Pfeiffer for one is particularly interested in the relics of the ancient past and the impact of Greek culture on the present.

There is a marked change in the narrative structure of *Flying Leaves,* from Asia Minor to Greece. Whereas the earlier narrative highlighted her mobility and movement, Pfeiffer's account of her time in Athens suggests permanence and fixity. In contrast to the Turkish dwellings and the harems of Asia Minor, Pfeiffer suggests that in Athens she

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[28] For instance, the British School at Athens was completed in 1886, following a suggestion by Professor Richard Jebb, after the French and American schools had already been established.
[29] Bastéa, p.56.

feels 'so much at home': 'Pictures, painted and verbal, have for once done their work with due effect, since nothing seems strange or wholly unexpected. Your coming seems rather a return; in any case you have arrived, you are not *parvenu*' (40). This statement is a testament to the ideological power of British Hellenism(s). Despite the lack of a direct colonial relationship with Greece, Pfeiffer experiences no sense of estrangement or alienation. Her sense of familiarity only seems to confirm her belief, established in the poem 'Hellas,' in the British as the rightful inheritors of the ancient Greeks. Furthermore, Pfeiffer's comment suggests how tourism constructs 'authentic' locations and experiences. Yet, it is in this homely location that Pfeiffer will come to feel a most acute sense of exclusion and estrangement.

In a nice twist of convention, Pfeiffer describes leaving her 'invalid' husband in their hotel room, recovering from a bad cold, whilst she takes herself off to the Acropolis. Despite her claims of 'familiarity,' Pfeiffer is undoubtedly impressed by the ancient buildings of the Acropolis. To Pfeiffer, like so many before her, the Acropolis 'haunts the city and the region round about…with a spell like the compelling impulse which forces us to gaze upon the setting sun' (39). Pfeiffer's description recalls Byron's famous line from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*: 'Where 'er we tread, / 'tis haunted, holy ground.'[30] Cultural haunting and reverential worship are central to Pfeiffer's interpretation of the Acropolis. Indeed, the Parthenon and its environs are described as 'sacred precincts' and 'the object of all worship' (42). The Parthenon is represented as the cult object of Hellenism and Hellenism is envisaged as the 'religion' of civilization.

Aware of her own role in re-presenting the Parthenon for a contemporary audience, Pfeiffer observes: 'It has so often been urged of late that no building could possibly bear the strain of so much greatness, the weight of such immortal memories, such immoderate expectation, as hangs about the Parthenon, that the traveller of to-day is perhaps liable to approach it with hopes unnaturally subdued (42).' Pfeiffer tells us, 'I was prepared to find the monument of small proportions.' But as she approaches the Parthenon she becomes fully aware of the structure's 'magnificent mass,' of its significance as a cultural and political symbol.

A number of travellers to Athens describe being overwrought by their visit to the Acropolis. One such visitor was Sigmund Freud who, when he finally reached the

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[30] Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto II, st.88.

Parthenon, noted, 'seeing something with one's own eyes is after all quite a different thing from hearing or reading about it.' He was compelled to conclude that 'it really does exist.' Freud's open-letter, 'A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis,' describes his experience of an Oedipal conflict, in the 'after-effect' of visiting the famous structure: 'there was something about it that was wrong, that from earliest times had been forbidden.'[31] Freud comes to the conclusion that what interfered with his enjoyment of 'the journey to Athens' was a feeling of filial piety, that it was 'something to do with the child's criticism of the father.' For Freud, the journey to Athens and the Parthenon in particular, was the culmination of his intellectual and aesthetic education. He had reached a place, geographically and educationally, that his father had been unable to attain.

Keith Hanley suggests that the Acropolis might be seen as a symbol of the father, of 'the whole empowering system of signification.'[32] Pfeiffer shares with Freud the notion that the Parthenon is an icon, a symbol of cultural power and prestige.[33] However, unlike Freud, Emily Pfeiffer is enthusiastically critical of patriarchy. Whereas Freud envisages his journey as a metaphorical return to the father, Pfeiffer's journey to Athens may be seen as a return to the origins of sexual difference. Where the Parthenon evokes a feeling of repression in Freud, the monument engenders a sense of oppression in Pfeiffer.

Pfeiffer positions herself (subserviently) beneath the monument, in order to contemplate the 'penetrating influence' of the Parthenon's partially erect columns:

> When I had settled down to its contemplation, silent and passive to its gradually penetrating influence, it ceased for me to be great or small, high or low, but stood there in pathetic ruin, glowing upon the azure sky, a golden temple, model and architype in the severity of its perfect idea, of all the temples that ever where or shall be (43).

The luminosity of the marble temple recalls the opacity of the harem and the dark days of Ottoman rule. Despite, or perhaps because of, its ruined state, the Parthenon still manages

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[31] Freud, Sigmund, 'A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis,' in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (see Freud above), 22: 244.

[32] See Hanley's essay, 'Wordsworth's Grand Tour,' in *Romantic Geographies* ed., Amanda Gilroy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 71-92 (p.71).

[33] As Mary Beard observes, 'it is reckoned that by the mid-nineteenth century there was hardly a sizeable town in Europe or North America that did not somewhere possess the cast of at least one of Elgin's

to shine as a symbol of 'democracy' and civilization. Yet, Pfeiffer is subtly critical of the 'severe' aesthetic and ideological values of the Greeks, as represented by the monument. Indeed, the ruined condition of the structure suggests the erosion, if not the failure, of ancient Greek ideals.

Fragments constantly allude to the context to which they once belonged. Reflection upon a fragment also reveals, as Lagerlöf suggests, 'a predicament of a higher order: of never being within the whole upon which we are reflecting, of remaining forever outside, observing and deciphering enigmatic and elusive hints instead of participating genuinely in a manifest taken-for-granted world.'[34] As she sits contemplating the fragmented structure before her, Pfeiffer is unable to resist the desire for inclusivity and participation. Adopting a kind of Platonic approach, Pfeiffer suggests that the fragmented monument intimates a transcendental reality outside itself, which she is able to decipher[35]:

> Then for a moment the scorns of time and the crueller wrong of the spoiler were repaired: it had become a temple of the mind, as the spirit seemed to rise above the object of sense, and to follow the fluted columns to that point in the depths of space to which their lines are said to converge…the Reason which had here found so visible a throne still cried aloud from the stones, and it was a deep joy to feel that you were of those who, however imperfectly, could hear its voice (43).

Pfeiffer's imaginative re-creation of the Parthenon momentarily grants her participation in the male-dominated discourses of aesthetics and philosophy. The rational, reasoning processes which produced the Parthenon were, however, gendered male. Pfeiffer's 'deep joy' does not last, as she knows that the idealized aesthetic object cannot be separated from ideological and ethical issues. Indeed, what emerges from the Parthenon and its sculptures is, for Pfeiffer, an ethics and aesthetics of sexual difference and a politics of exclusion.

The decision to build the Parthenon was taken by the Athenian assembly, on the instigation of the Greek statesman Pericles. As many critics have illustrated, the structure can be seen to reflect the social, political, aesthetic and religious beliefs of the ancient

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marbles.' See Mary Beard's *The Parthenon* for a more detailed discussion of the social, historical and political issues concerning the monument, (London: Profile Books, [2002] 2004), p.18.

[34] Margaretha Rossholm Lagerlöf, *The Sculptures of the Parthenon: Aesthetics and Interpretation* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 117.

[35] For a more detailed discussion on Plato's views of the visible, in relation to the Parthenon see Lagerlöf, p.119.

Athenians. The culture that produced the Parthenon was (even by ancient standards) peculiarly androcentric. However, femininity is a fundamental component of the Parthenon. The temple was built (in part) to honour the goddess Athena. It is she who gives the Parthenon, as well as the Athenian *polis*, its name. In *Lectures in the Philosophy of World History*, Hegel envisages the goddess as the representative of the Athenian *polis*: 'Athena the goddess is Athens itself—i.e., the real and concrete spirit of the citizens.'[36] Likewise, as Pfeiffer indicates in the poem 'Hellas,' Athena is central to an understanding of the Parthenon and the Parthenon is central to understanding Athens.

Athena is an incredibly powerful figure, especially for women. A virginal warrior with the face of a Gorgon on her breast, Athena exudes authority and demands reverence. She is also a highly transgressive figure who crosses gender boundaries and is closely associated with men. According to *A Description of Greece*, by the ancient Greek travel-writer Pausanias, a huge ivory and gold statue of Athena once stood in the East chamber of the Parthenon.[37] Pausanias notes that at the feet of the virgin goddess lies a snake 'who would be Erichthonios' and 'sculpted on the base of the statue is the birth of Pandora' (1.24.7). As Mary Beard points out, Pausanias ignores the architectural features of the Parthenon, preferring to relate the details of this rather kitsch and elaborate statue instead.[38] As a tourist in Athens, Pausanias must therefore have felt that the statue was of particular importance, in terms of Athenian identity politics.

The myth of Erichthonios details the mythological origins of the first Athenian. According to one version of the myth, Erichthonios was born from the earth after the sperm of the artisan-god Hephaestus, dripped from the Athena's leg and onto fertile soil. Henceforth Athenian citizens could claim to be truly indigenous to their city and to have divine origins that bypassed human maternity. Pandora, the first human woman of the 'race of women,' (who, incidentally, was born wearing a veil) was said to have been crafted by Zeus and sent as a curse for Prometheus's transgressions against the gods.[39] As Loraux suggests, 'it is not insignificant for us that the first Athenian and the first

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[36] See Hegel, *Lectures in the Philosophy of World History,* trans., H. B. Nisbet; intro., by Duncan Forbes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1837]1975). However, in *The Children of Athena: Athenian Ideas about Citizenship and the Division Between the Sexes,* trans., Caroline Levine (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), Nicole Loraux cautions us against Hegel's over-determined interpretation of Athena.

[37] The statue of Athena was lost in antiquity without trace.

[38] Beard, *The Parthenon*, p.28.

[39] The myth of Pandora is explicated by Hesiod in the *Theogony* and *Works and Days*.

woman, an apparently asymmetrical couple, occupy the same place on the Acropolis in Athens, at the feet of the goddess and under her protection.'[40] The myths of Erichthonios and Pandora can be seen to reinforce the notion of sexual asymmetry, as an integral feature of the Athenian *polis*. Moreover, the myth of Athenian autochthony constitutes a denial of women. From the outset, women are excluded from the founding of Athens as well as from the procreation of the first Athenian. As Loraux observes, 'democracy is grafted onto autochthony.'[41]

Disempowered by her birth and autochthony, Athena may therefore be seen as a deeply ambiguous figure. For Luce Irigaray, Athena represents the father's projection and idealization of woman. Springing forth from Zeus' head, Athena is a sexless figure, yet she is also representative of femininity as envisaged by the male god:

> Adorned, femininity—manifestation of the father's idea of feminine power. Appropriating the mother's power, swallowing it up, introjecting it, he engenders, produces this daughter who (only) gives herself for that which she is not: a simulacrum assumed by the God to help him in his work, to establish his empire. An empire of pretense which claims to do without the body, an empire of death.[42]

Athena functions as a man's [Zeus] (self) image of a woman. She is, according to Grosz, 'a particular "kind" of woman, one who "collaborates" and acts as a mouthpiece for masculine values.'[43]

Having read Pausanias in some detail, Pfeiffer knows that the Parthenon was built in honour of Athena who is effectively dispossessed in her role as the founder of Athens by the civic myth of autochthony. She notes: 'the statue of the great goddess was no longer in its place; its ivory had become dust, its gold had probably been coined, and, stamped with some baser earthly image, had been passed from hand to hand' (43). The feminine presence, at the heart of Athenian culture, has been debased and destroyed. The absent statue of Athena, suggests to Pfeiffer the repeated absence of women from full socio-political representation.

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[40] Loraux, *Children of Athena*, p.114.
[41] Loraux, *Children of Athena*, p.50.
[42] See Luce Irigaray's 'Veiled Lips,' *Mississippi Review* 11:3 (1983): 98-119. Reprinted (not in full) in *Sexual Subversions*, ed. Elizabeth Grosz (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1989), p.164.
[43] Grosz, p.165.

As a fragmented structure, the building itself suggests absence. But, at the time of Pfeiffer's visit, the Parthenon is not without a strong feminine presence:

> If Time has its revenges, History has its bitter irony...In these precincts, consecrated to the purest worship known to the Athenian world, the Turk installed his harem, and fouled the wholesome spring enshrined within it by foeted droppings from the sullen pool which gathers about the stagnant life of slaves. It might seem that the womanhood which, in its free strength and affectional impulse, had no accredited place in the Athenian polity, had avenged itself by coming to life among these ruins in some lower serpent form (44).

The symbolism of the Parthenon both enables and disables Pfeiffer's feminist argument; Athena is absent, but the disenfranchised Turkish women are disturbingly evident. The juxtaposition of the harem within the Parthenon is symbolically very suggestive. The harem not only recalls the painful years of Ottoman rule and the ambiguous identity of modern Greece, but also the failures of ancient Greek 'democracy.' In part, the Parthenon was designed to signify the triumphs of the 'democratic' Greeks over the 'barbaric' Persians. For Pfeiffer, however, the harem is a reminder that the ancient Greeks were a slave-owning society, which did not recognise the social, political and economic rights of women. 'The Attic love of liberty,' Pfeiffer observes, 'accommodated itself perfectly with the institution of slavery for a moiety of mankind, and the permanent subjection of its less militant half' (60). Pfeiffer, like Levy, reminds us that in a male-dominated society like Classical Athens, gender was an organizing principle. Indeed, Pfeiffer seems to anticipate the work of Nicole Loraux who suggests that, 'there is no first Athenian woman; there is not, and never has been, a real female Athenian. The political process does not recognize a "citizeness," the language has no word for a woman from Athens.'[44] Consequently, in no way can Greek (European) values be considered morally superior to those of the Turks. By their very *presence* in the symbolically loaded space of the Parthenon, the Turkish women can be seen to avenge the *absence* of womankind from European social, political and aesthetic discourses. Ultimately, Pfeiffer suggests that aesthetic judgements should be informed by ethical considerations. Of course, Pfeiffer's own ethical' observations are infused with racist and imperialist prejudices that cannot be ignored.

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[44] Loraux, *Children of Athena*, p.10.

In *Flying Leaves* Pfeiffer's physical exploration of Athens begins and ends with the Parthenon. That is not to say that Pfeiffer's engagement or confrontation with Greek culture comes to an end. Pfeiffer re-directs her narrative to the literary productions of the ancient Greeks in order to re-examine the issues, such as gender, power and citizenship, raised by her reading of the Acropolis. In so doing, Pfeiffer effectively transforms her travelogue into a philosophic and political treatise. Reading ancient texts *in situ* was supposed to provide new insights, new revelations, for the educated traveller. For instance, Murray's *Handbook* declared that 'Greek authors acquire new and clearer meanings read by the light of Greek scenery and topography.'[45] In Athens, Emily Pfeiffer certainly seems to gain a new understanding of Platonic philosophy[46]:

> Reading on the spot in Plato's 'Republic' what has been said in relation to woman by one who was of the noblest of Athenian citizens, one is led to confess to the severe logic which has directed his conclusions from the premiss of such an initial conclusion. The Athenian world, more than that of its neighbour States, still more than that of some other ancient peoples, was a world without woman in any true sense (59).

Perhaps the most famous exposition of archaic 'feminism' is recorded in Book V of Plato's *Republic.* As part of his ideal state, Plato proposes that there should be equality amongst the governing elite, which, extraordinarily, was to include women. Plato's ideal state would not therefore be a 'world without women,' but would ascribe women civic status. As a campaigner for women's rights it seems incredible that Pfeiffer should object to Plato's provocative egalitarianism. However, as I noted earlier, Plato's texts suggest contradictory attitudes toward women that can be described as proto-feminist and misogynist in turn.[47] Pfeiffer, for her part, interprets Plato's philosophic dialogues, not in terms of transcendentalism, but as texts which sustain and maintain gender difference:

> How instructive is the whole of that fifth book of the "Republic" which treats of the "Education of Women"!— what a light it lets in on the history and tendency of

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[45] Murray's *Handbook* (1896), p.xxix.

[46] One must also consider which version of the *Republic* Pfeiffer was reading in Athens. Pfeiffer, it seems, was unable to read Greek in the original. It is therefore likely that she was reading one of the popular contemporary translations of Plato's dialogues. Consequently, Pfeiffer may have been reading a version of the *Republic* which deliberately downplayed Plato's proposals for sexual equality. See Bluestone, *Women and the Ideal Society: Plato's Republic and Modern Myths of Gender* (Oxford: Berg, 1987).

[47] See my discussion of Plato in chapter one.

> Greek thought! It is the masculine spirit working alone that we trace in this portion of the wonderful Utopia—the Babel Tower whose malarious ruins are still to be found in Constantinople and elsewhere under the rule of the Turk. Was ever an outrage so callous perpetrated upon the human affections as that advocated in this book of the divine Plato? (65)

In order to bring about his ideal state Plato proposed to abolish the family. This radical idea was not however, conceived in terms of sexual equality. As Okin reminds us, 'neither equality nor liberty nor justice in the sense of fairness were values for Plato.'[48] Further, 'women are classified by Plato, as they were by the culture in which he lived, as an important subsection of property.'[49] Thus, by eradicating the traditional family unit, women and their children would become the collective property of the male civic elite in Plato's ideal state. Pfeiffer is understandably outraged as the philosopher makes his radical suggestions not on the basis of equality and justice, but on the basis of patriarchal dominance. Pfeiffer is therefore able to draw a comparison between Plato's suggestions of communal living, with the harems of the Ottoman Empire.

According to Pfeiffer, Plato's 'severe logic' lacks sympathy and empathy. These failures are not only manifest in his attitude to women but also with regard to the disciplines of poetry and music. As an accomplished poet herself, Pfeiffer particularly objects to Plato's proposal to censor poets and the practice of poetry in his ideal state:

> We have seen the scant honour and place accorded in the "Republic" to the affections. If women were only to form part of it on the condition of becoming unsexed, so also was Poetry, with the revered name of Homer as its representative driven from the scene, only to be re-admitted when deprived of the means of rising into the empyrean, bitted, harnessed, and broken to the yoke of the State. It will be averred that the feminine principle was persecuted in good company (61).

Pfeiffer admits that Plato was himself more 'than half a poet,' but he was distanced from his fellow human beings by concrete thinking and 'unincarnate Reason.' In an age 'when the virtues proper to women were mostly the invention of men', 'the great trinity of dramatists, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, poetry and womanhood, love and truth, were justified as against philosophy' (63). Pfeiffer singles out Sophocles' *Antigone* for particular praise.

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[48] Okin, p.28.

Pfeiffer's choice of *Antigone* is both strategic and suggestive, specifically with regard to the socio-political exclusion of women. For Pfeiffer, the figure of Antigone represents 'a type of essential womanhood.' Antigone is a particularly interesting figure from ancient literature, as through acts of public speaking and self-immolation, she is seen to do profound violence to the social, political and legal systems of Thebes.[50] In Antigone, as Saxonhouse points out, 'we meet a woman who will yield nothing to the city.'[51]

Perhaps the most famous (nineteenth-century) reading of Sophocles play is that of G.W.F. Hegel. For Hegel Antigone represents kinship and its dissolution, against the emergent ethical order and state authority of the King. According to *The Phenomenology of Spirit* men, but not women, can achieve self-consciousness, that is to say, become fully individualized human beings. Men achieve this by engaging in conflict and collaboration (work) with other men in the public sphere. Men thus become citizens endowed with the capacity and right to participate in public life; women, on the other hand, belong only to the family. In praising Sophocles for his representation of a disturbingly transgressive and powerful woman, Pfeiffer can be seen to contest essentialist arguments concerning citizenship and social organization.

Pfeiffer does not, however, dwell on the complexities of Antigone's actions. Rather her allusion is intended to highlight the issues of patrilineal inheritance and the exclusion of women from socio-political processes. Antigone's representational status is highly complex and ambiguous. As Judith Butler points out, Antigone 'articulates a prepolitical opposition to politics, representing *kinship as the sphere that conditions the possibility of politics without ever entering into it.*'[52] Pfeiffer's allusion to Antigone is not intended to resolve the difficulties of Antigone's status, but to raise the issue of the crisis in representation for female non-citizens.

Echoing Tennyson, Pfeiffer concludes, 'philosophies are for a day, their systems fail, succeed and demolish each other.' But, she says, 'the words of the great poets are monumental' (65). For Pfeiffer, the dramatic literature of ancient Greece has universal

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[49] Okin, p.31.
[50] For a series of provocative essays on the transgressive feminist potential of the figure of Antigone see *Laughing With Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*, ed. Vanda Zajko & Miriam Leonard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), especially chapters three, four and five.
[51] Arlene Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.64.
[52] Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p.2. *Italics in original.*

appeal, as it takes account of women's lives and experiences and the ethical dilemmas which arise from prejudice. Pfeiffer is keen to contest and resist Plato's conclusions precisely because his ideas were seen as central to the cultural re-generation of Victorian Britain. Jenkyns points out that for many reformers and politicians of the late nineteenth century, 'in Plato they found an ancient author who seemed to be joining in the debate with the newest, most stimulating thinkers of their time.'[53] The long since dead Plato was a very well-travelled (and well-received) theorist. The philosophy of Plato may be seen as a reverse example of how colonization may occur at the level of narrative and imagination.[54]

In order to resist Platonic doctrine, Pfeiffer attempts to restore the geographical and temporal distance between her own time and that of the ancient Greeks:

> When I read and mark these things, I turn from the wisdom of Greece; it has become to me foolishness. I turn from the Acropolis, where stands the golden Parthenon, trembling as of its own beauty upon the palpitating ether; I look away from it, and the system which within it and around, has reached its fullest expansion. I seek a wisdom higher and more fruitful than the unmated Reason: the wisdom that is justified of her children. I aspire to equal justice, I look for unbounded liberty (65-66).

Pfeiffer's initial feelings upon reaching Athens, of homeliness and belonging were clearly misplaced. Upon reflection, Pfeiffer now feels a distinct feeling of exclusion and estrangement. In the face of Greek androcentrism, Pfeiffer is compelled to dis-inherit herself from the Hellenic tradition. From Pfeiffer's altered/marginalized perspective, Hellenism can no longer be considered as an appropriate cultural model for the British Empire, as the discourse threatens to re-inscribe the misogynist beliefs and practices of the ancient Greeks. However, Pfeiffer's conception of 'unbounded liberty' is in fact heavily mediated by contemporary debates concerning class and race. Whilst Pfeiffer's journey to Greece challenged her preconceptions and enlivened her feminism, her travels east also reinforced her belief in British racial and moral superiority.

In the autumn of 1884, Pfeiffer and her husband began their journey west, to the 'New World' of the United Sates of America. Although impressed by the material and economic prosperity of the Americans, Pfeiffer adopts a condescendingly Eurocentric position. Rather like Plato, Pfeiffer in fact demonstrates a distinct hostility to the

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[53] Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, p.247.

principles of democracy. Indeed, Pfeiffer's response to her encounter with a group of 'unwashed, unchanged and unkempt men and boys' is astoundingly hypocritical and prejudicial: 'we look democracy for the first time in the face; and whatever may be its merits, they are hardly of a nature to provoke love at first sight' (86). If social equality is unpalatable to Pfeiffer, the multicultural make-up of America is downright disturbing to her:

> In this hotel the waiters are white, but the negroes we see abroad, servants, and more particularly coachmen, are far removed in aspect from the thick-lipped, flat-nosed race I had expected to meet. Their noses have mostly got, or are on the way to get bridges; and bridge to a nose, like a high road in a new country, is an element of progress. One or two I have seen, as black almost as sloes, and with wool upon the head as dense as that of sheep, who had this feature quite in an advanced state of development; and a young girl in a graceful hat and feathers was an accomplished American beauty, looked at through a sable veil; but this last was, I confess, an exception. What is this alchemy of climate or conditions which so acts upon the human subject? (82).

Pfeiffer attempts to couch her racism in the discourses of ethnography and anthropology. Her racism is, however, profoundly unempirical. Without irony she observes, 'the claim that all American citizens are equal it is impossible to entertain in the face of patent facts' (80). In the *Republic*, Plato suggests that it is only Athenian citizens, the elite of Athens, who are to enjoy social and political freedoms. Pfeiffer's conception of social equality and justice is similarly ridden with a fear of diversity. Only for Pfeiffer the elite includes educated women like herself.

Despite the explosions, neglect and vandalism, the monuments of ancient Athens remain, for the most part, standing. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, history has not been so kind to Emily Pfeiffer. Pfeiffer was not lost in the Levant, or left stranded in the mountains of the Peloponnese. Rather, for over a hundred years, Pfeiffer was lost to literary history. As *Flying Leaves* demonstrates, Pfeiffer is a writer of remarkable range and sophistication. She is also a writer who reflects the social and political issues and prejudices of her time. *Flying Leaves from East and West* is a complex cultural document, not least because it captures cultures, specifically those of Greece and America, and Pfeiffer herself, undergoing a process of transition. Paradoxically,

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[54] I again refer to Kristi Siegel's excellent introduction to *Issues in Travel Writing*, p.3.

Pfeiffer's journeys destabilized and confirmed her feminist identity and her nationalist and imperial subjectivity. If ancient Greece was 'a world without woman in any true sense,' Emily Pfeiffer was determined that Victorian Britain would acknowledge women as independent intellectual and political beings. The travelogue of this extraordinary Victorian woman may be seen as a significant contribution to that end.

As we have seen, Pfeiffer's conception of Hellenism changed over the course of her career. From the idealized vision of ancient Greece in 'Hellas,' to the denunciation of Greek art and philosophy in *Flying Leaves*, Pfeiffer's change in attitude toward Hellenism can be seen to reflect her own development as a writer and political activist. Pfeiffer recognised the 'feminist' potential in the ancient characters of Cassandra, Clytemnestra and Antigone. All three figures can be seen as inspirational sources of strength and resourcefulness, as well as fierce figures of protest and rage. Indeed, what Emily Pfeiffer found in Greek literature and myth were 'feminine' models, which could challenge the very precepts of 'democracy.' For Pfeiffer, Greece was not simply an ancient land on distant shores, but a vital political and imaginative space in which she could examine and explore her frustrations and hopes for her sex.

Conclusion

Looking Back With an Eye to the Future: Feminist Mythmaking

The trend for Greek tragedy grew in the final decade of the nineteenth century and continued well into the twentieth century. The popular interest in tragic drama was matched by academic interest in the origins of ancient ritual and myth. James Frazer's comprehensive investigation into myth, *The Golden Bough* (1890), Jane Ellen Harrison's *Myths of the Odyssey in Art and Literature* (1882) and Harrison and Verrall's *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens* (1890), concentrated on the socio-religious practices of the Greeks. As Louis notes, 'as the century wore on, this insistence on a spiritual vision that acknowledged and incorporated pain, loss, and division grew and shifted the emphasis once more away from the gods of light, toward the chthonic deities and the gods of the Mysteries.'[1] Louis observes that, 'such scorn for the Olympians, such praise for the Mysteries, goes against the wide current on the surface of mid-Victorian culture—the current that most commentators have taken for the whole sea.'[2]

This shift in academic interest did not dampen enthusiasm for the Greek tragedies. Gilbert Murray's translations of the ancient tragedies, particularly the work of Euripides, and the inauguration of the Cambridge Greek play in 1895, all contributed to keeping classics at the centre of a flourishing intellectual scene. At the centre of that scene was a group of academics who have become known as the 'Cambridge Ritualists.' The supposed 'members' of this loosely defined 'group' included Gilbert Murray, Francis Cornford, A.B. Cook and Jane Ellen Harrison. Others have also listed James Frazer as another peripheral member, despite Frazer's fierce repudiation of ritualism later in his career.[3] The work of these Cambridge academics certainly reinforces the sense that in

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[1] Margot K. Louis, 'Gods and Mysteries,' p.341.
[2] Louis, 'Gods and Mysteries,' p.342.
[3] For a good introduction to the Cambridge Ritualists see *The Cambridge Ritualists Reconsidered*, ed. William Calder (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991). However, May Beard argues against the notion that the 'Ritualists' were an easily defined group, sharing common intellectual goals. See *The Invention of Jane Harrison*, especially chapter eight.

the late nineteenth century, the emphasis shifts from the homosocial Hellenism of Oxford to the feminist-inclined Hellenism of Cambridge.[4]

Indeed, one of the most influential figures of this cluster of classical scholars was the Newnham educated, Jane Ellen Harrison (1850-1928). As Beard points out, the basic message of Harrison's work, 'that somewhere underneath the calm, shining, rational exterior of the classical world is a mass of weird, seething irrationality—is a tenet that almost everyone working in the history of Greek culture would now take for granted.'[5] After early excursions in the ideality of Greek art, Harrison moved away from the grandeur of the Olympians to study the anthropological origins of Greek myth and religion. In her now famous works, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903), *Themis* (1912) and *Epilegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1921), Harrison devised a daring reading of the Greeks as an often irrational and mystical people.

The cult of Dionysus features heavily in Harrison's early work. In *Alpha and Oemga* (1915) for instance, Harrison declared her 'deep inward dissatisfaction with the Olympian religion,' and her preference for the 'savage disorders' of the Mystery gods, 'Demeter, Dionysus, the cosmic Eros.'[6] Moreover, in *Prolegomena*, Harrison re-presented Dionysus as a thoroughly feminized god:

> The interesting thing about Dionysos is that, develop as he may, he bears to the end, as no other god does, the stamp of his matriarchal origin. He can never rid himself of the throng of worshipping women, he is always the nursling of his Maenads. Moreover the instruments of his cult are always not his but his mother's. It is not enough to say that all orgiastic cults have analogies, nor, as is usually maintained, that the worship of Kybele came in classical times from Asia Minor, and was *contaminated* with that of Dionysos. All this is true, but the roots of the analogy lie deeper down. The Mother and the Son were together from the beginning.[7]

As Peacock notes, 'Harrison posited the historical existence of matriarchy by connecting matrilineal descent and the presence of the pre-Olympian earth goddesses.' Yet, unlike Freud and Bachofen, who asserted the overthrow of matriarchy by patriarchy as a positive development toward 'civilization,' Harrison, 'straddled the fence by being

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[4] Prins, 'Greek Maenads, Victorian Spinsters,' p.46
[5] Mary Beard, *The Invention of Jane Harrison,* p.7.
[6] Harrison, *Alpha and Omega* (London, 1915), see pp. 201-204.

neither overtly lyrical about these goddesses and the matriarchy they represented nor overly hostile toward the patriarchal structure that Olympianism reflected.'[8] If Harrison was tentative about her conclusions in *Prolegomena*, her body of work on Greek ritualism firmly established the importance of the cult of Dionysus in the study of ancient Greek culture.

In her fascinating biography of Harrison, Mary Beard suggests that Harrison not only changed the way we think about the ancient Greeks, she also 'put women academics and women's colleges (dangerously) on the map.'[9] In the history of classical scholarship and Victorian Hellenism Harrison cuts a particularly impressive figure. Indeed, Beard suggests that, Harrison's 'new vision of the Greek past...found a ready audience among modernist writers and critics in the first half of the twentieth century' [10]:

> T.S. Eliot had read *Themis* as soon as it appeared and discussed it in a Harvard graduate paper—and his later construction of the "primitive" was explicitly influenced by Harrison and her "fascinating" books. Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) figured a version of the ancient world that drew directly on Harrison (not surprisingly: her lectures notes taken on a Greek cruise in 1932 show that the lecturer was feeding his audience pure *Prolegomena*). Virginia Woolf, in *A Room of One's Own*, pointed to Harrison's work on Greek archaeology...as a prime example of distinguished non-fiction writing by a woman. And she gave her ghost a famous walk-on part, haunting the gardens of Fernham College (a thinly disguised Newnham).[11]

In *Hypatia: Or Woman and Knowledge* (1925) Dora Russell celebrated the 'votaries' of the previous generation, who, like Harrison, gave 'the classics, science, medicine, the history of the world...They, these pioneers, childless, unwed, created and bore thousands of women.'[12] However, Russell's tribute to the previous generation of 'feminist' revisionists seems to have been the exception, rather than the rule. Hurst suggests that Harrison's enthusiasm for the Dionysian had little impact on the next generation of

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[7] Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), p.561. Italics in original.
[8] Sandra Peacock, *Jane Ellen Harrison: The Mask and the Self* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1988), p.188.
[9] Beard, *Invention of Jane Harrison*, p.xi.
[10] Beard, *Invention of Jane Harrison*, p.7
[11] Beard, *Invention of Jane Harrison*, p.8. Martha Carpentier also suggests that Harrison influences the writing of T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. See M.C. Carpentier's *Ritual, Myth and the Modernist Text* (Australia: Gordon & Breach, 1998).

women writers, who instead, 'wanted to go on from university to a literary career combined with a fulfilling domestic life.'[13]

Hurst points out that, '"Michael Field" and Jane Ellen Harrison may have adopted the "Greek Maenad" as "an imaginary alternative to the Victorian spinster," but for writers like Dorothy Sayers and Vera Brittan, 'it was a derogatory image.'[14] As Hurst observes:

> Pervasive ideas about the psychological damage inflicted by prolonged celibacy undermined women at Oxford in their attempts to gain equality with men. During the First World War rigid notions of propriety had been relaxed; the mothers of illegitimate "war-babies" were treated less harshly than the "fallen women" of the Victorian period. The need to replace the men who had been killed meant that the post-war spinster became a symbol of the nation's decline, and popular versions of Freudian theories caused the repression of sexual desire to be seen as unhealthy.[15]

Moreover, the socio-medical discourses of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century had already pathologized the actively sexual woman, and particularly the 'lesbian.' Communities of 'single,' intellectual women were perceived as, at best, unnatural, and many writers found themselves reassuring their readers of their uncorrupted 'femininity.' Indeed, Hurst cites N.M. Haldane's (later Naomi Mitchison) 'Awakening of the Bacchae,' in which Haldane 'rewrites a negative image of uncontrolled, violent female force to reassure her readers that the women liberated by the First World War will not abuse their unwonted freedom.' As Hurst notes, 'the Bacchae of this poem are not savage or destructive…their awakening does not endanger anyone, the "god" who endows them with "wisdom" does not inspire violence or loss of control.'[16] In other words, after the violence of the First World War, the transgressive power of Dionysus had been neutralized and his maenads had been de-sexualized and pacified.

It was not until the later decades of the twentieth century and the advent of 'second wave feminism' that women writers returned to the disturbing and tragic figures from Greek literature and mythology, in significant numbers. In the work of Sandra

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[12] Dora Russell, *Hypatia, or Woman and Knowledge* (London: Kegan Paul, 1925), p.16-17. Cited by Hurst, p.199.
[13] Hurst, p.198.
[14] Hurst, p.200.
[15] Hurst, p.199.
[16] Hurst, p.201.

Gilbert, Slyvia Plath and Rachel Blau DuPlessis the violently transgressive woman of myth made something of a comeback.[17] Ostriker notes that, 'when they traffic in the demonic, women poets have produced some of the most highly charged images in recent American poetry.'[18] Yet, as with the writing of Levy, Michael Field and Pfeiffer, it would be a mistake to interpret these raging female characters as simple figures of protest (which they most certainly are), or cathartic expressions of the anger of women writers.

As we have seen, the positive benefits for women writers of revising established female characters from myth and ancient literature are numerous. Firstly, appropriating canonical texts or mythological narratives gives one access to discourses invested with immense cultural power and authority, typically denied women. Yet, by approaching classical subjects from an explicitly gendered position, women writers are able to expose the mythological and literary narratives of the past as predominantly stories of *male* experience. In so doing, women may reveal the extent to which all historical and mythological narratives are gendered and ideologically fraught. Further, by complicating notions of gender, as well as foregrounding it as a subjective position, writers may also explore the relationships between sex, gender, sexual practice and desire. Indeed, the ancient past may be seen as particularly useful conceptual space for exploring 'sexuality,' from a non-contemporaneous point of view. Potentially explosive emotions and controversial subjects can also be seen to be explored at a 'safe' distance. Writing from within the classical tradition, women are also able to challenge readers' assumptions about the past and question the value of individual myths for the future. Furthermore, integral to the revision of 'classic' texts or myths, are the wider cultural issues of scholarship, translation, transmission and interpretation.

These complex cultural issues are addressed by Adrienne Rich in her seminal essay, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision' (1971). Rich's 'call to literature' is worth quoting at length:

> Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural

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[17] See DuPlessis's 'Medusa' in *Wells* (1980); Plath's 'Edge' in *Collected Poems* (1981), and Susan Gilbert's 'Bas Relief: Bacchante' appeared in *Massachsetts Review* (Winter, 1976). Poems reprinted in Ostriker, *Writing Like a Woman* (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1983), p.134.

[18] Ostriker, *Stealing the Language* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p.221. Ostriker cites Plath's 'Lady Lazarus' and DuPlessis's 'Medusa' as examples.

history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name—and therefore live—afresh.[19]

Similarly, Alicia Ostriker celebrates women poets as 'thieves of language,' who, as 'revisionist mythmakers,' redefine both woman and culture:

> Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible.[20]

However, a number of critics have argued that revising myth may be counterproductive for women writers, as it is conceived and inscribed in terms of a male-dominated discourse. To revise myth is therefore to reinscribe and validate a discourse of male dominance. Further, myth by its very nature claims an atemporal universality. Consequently, women writers who employ mythical female figures as exemplars of 'femininity' or 'womanhood' may be at best, accused of biological essentialism or at worst, ignoring the critical differences between women, in terms of class, culture, nationality, ethnicity and sexual orientation. As Cornell suggests, 'to write of Woman homogenizes, masking the differences.'[21] Purkiss also suggests that changing the focus of mythological narratives from male to female, or shifting the terms of a myth so that what was a negative female role becomes a positive female role, is a highly problematic literary strategy. As Purkiss notes, by insisting that "positive" images of women are somehow timeless and by refusing to recognize the 'literariness of literature,' feminist

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[19] Rich's 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision' (1971) is re-printed in full in *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose,* selected & ed., Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi & Albert Gelpi (New York; London: Norton & Co., [1975] 1993), pp.166-177.

[20] Ostriker, *Stealing the Language*, p.212-13.

[21] Drucilla Cornell, 'Feminine Writing, Metaphor, and Myth' in *Between Ethics and Aesthetics*, ed. Glowacka & Boos (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp.161-185 (p.181).

stories may, 'repeatedly founder if we assume that stories can be excised from text, culture and institution, that their meanings are not circumscribed by their histories.'[22]

But as Ostriker points out, 'revisionist poems do not necessarily confine themselves to defiance or reversal strategies.'[23] Other theorists, such as Luce Irigaray, suggest that the deliberate assumption of the feminine role, what Irigaray calls *mimicry*, can positively align the writer with the silence and marginalization of women:

> To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself—inasmuch as she is on the side of the "perceptible," of "matter"—to "ideas", in particular to ideas about herself that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make "visible," by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language.[24]

Such writing is what Irigaray calls 'disruptive excess.' The historically silenced and marginalized may be given voices, and a tradition which may have appeared closed to women suddenly appears full of creative possibilities. In this sense, Irigaray's claim to 'femininity' may be seen as a resourceful political strategy.[25] In a similar vein, Ostriker points out that, 'where women write strongly as women, it is clear that their intention is to subvert and transform the life and literature they inherit.'[26] Cixous also writes that, 'to fly/steal is woman's gesture, to steal into language to make it fly. We have all learned flight/theft, the art with many techniques, for all the centuries we have only had access to having by stealing/flying.'[27] Furthermore, 'a feminine text cannot be more than subversive: if it writes itself it is in volcanic heaving of the old "real" property crust. In ceaseless displacement.'[28]

I would argue that what is most impressive about the revisionism of late-Victorian women writers is precisely their grasp of the 'literariness' of literature and the endless capacity for re-interpretation. Neither Levy, Michael Field, nor Emily Pfeiffer purport to

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[22] Pukiss, 'Women Re-writing Myths' in *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, ed. Carolyne Larrington (London: Pandora Press, 1992), pp.441-457 (p.442).
[23] Ostriker, *Stealing the Language*, p.217.
[24] Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985b), p.76.
[25] For a more detailed discussion of Irigaray's essentialist position in relation to myth see Cornell, pp.168-174.
[26] Ostriker, *Stealing the Language*, p.211.
[27] Cixous, p.96.
[28] Cixous, p.97.

having created the final, definitive version of the female figures they represent. Moreover, these writers do not seek to excise classical female figures from their historical, cultural or literary context. Rather, working within the classical tradition, women writers remind their audience that classical myths and literature have significance in a contemporary setting, if only as figures for comparison or inspiration. Finding a space within the classical tradition from which to speak does not necessarily mean acquiescence with all of the tenets of a male-dominated discourse. As I hope I have shown in this study, many women writers of the late nineteenth century were prepared to actively engage with the classics, in terms of scholarship, translation, teaching and editing, as well as re-writing. Consequently, these women do not merely tinker with the classics in the hope of re-casting tragic female figures as positive role-models. They were more concerned with expanding the boundaries of Victorian Hellenism(s), in order to incorporate female experience.

Indeed, throughout this study I have stressed the inter-connectivity, the inter-textuality and the dialogic nature of Victorian Hellenisms. Not only were women writers writing in relation or response to their male counterparts, they were in dialogue with or indebted to one another. In recognising such networks, our understanding of the intellectual history of the nineteenth century is changed. Moreover, the sophisticated use of form by writers like Levy, Field and Pfeiffer can be seen to reflect an ongoing preoccupation with expanding the boundaries of Hellenic discourse. Whilst the aims and agendas of these women may have differed, all of these writers acknowledge Hellenism as a rich source of intellectual and creative inspiration. The Hellenic characters that they appropriated and re-created were the ideal vehicles through which they could explore their frustrations, fantasies, hopes and fears. In looking back into the ancient past, all of these writers expressed their hopes for a brighter, more egalitarian future.

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